A NOVEL OF THE FUTURE COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE!

STARTLING STORIES

MAY

15¢

FEATURING

BLOOD ON THE SUN

An Amazing Book-Length Novel of Martian Menace

By HAL K. WELLS

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

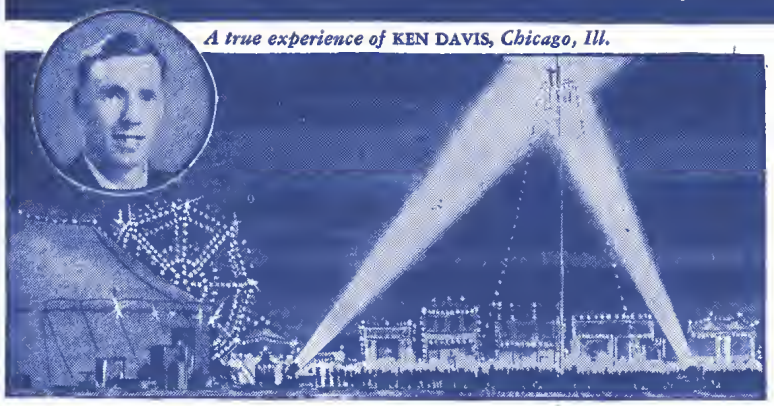
15¢ SCIENTIFICTION AT ITS BEST

STARTLING STORIES

MAY 1942

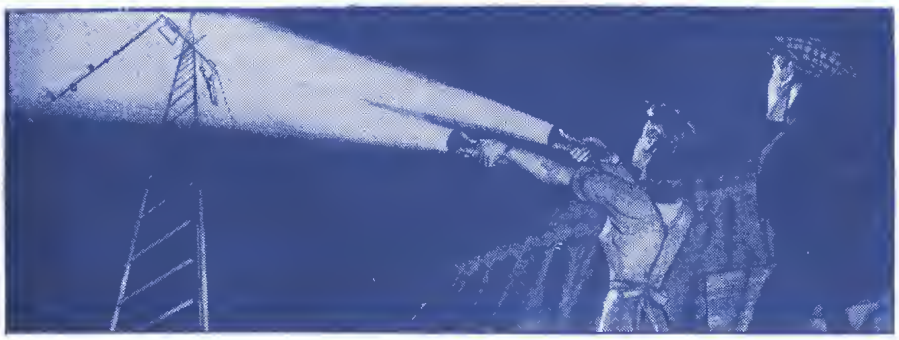
"THE HORRIFIED CROWD GASPED AT MY PLIGHT!"

A true experience of KEN DAVIS, *Chicago, Ill.*



"SEVENTY FEET ABOVE the crowd at a carnival, I was performing my high aerial act," writes Mr. Davis. "I was a bit nervous, for this was our opening night . . . when anything can happen. I work without arm guards, wires, nets, or safety devices of any kind. There can't be any mistake in such an act.

"THE CROWD WAS TENSE as the climax of my act drew near . . . when I had to turn loose both rings, perform a half flip in mid-air and catch the rings again. It was sudden death if I failed. As the snare drums rolled, I swung high and loosened my grip. Then—*darkness* as all the lights went out!



"FOR AN AWFUL INSTANT I thought I was a 'goner.' Suddenly—in the nick of time—the bright beams of two 'Eveready' flashlights in my wife's steady hands flooded the rings with light. I finished my act. Thanks to my wife's coolness and foresight, and those dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries, a possible tragedy was averted. *(Signed)* Ken Davis"

The word "Eveready" is a registered trade-mark of National Carbon Company, Inc.

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* DATE-LINE

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Unit of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation

UCC

Why Trained Accountants Command High Salaries

—and how ambitious men are qualifying by the La Salle Problem Method

GET this straight.

By "accountancy" we do not mean "bookkeeping." For accountancy begins where bookkeeping leaves off.

The skilled accountant takes the figures handed him by the bookkeeper, and *analyzes* and *interprets* them.

He knows how much the costs in the various departments should amount to, how they may be lowered.

He knows what profits should be expected from a given enterprise, how they may be increased.

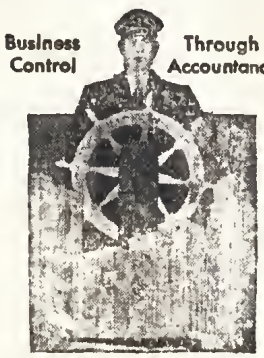
He knows, in a given business, what per cent of one's working capital can safely be tied up in merchandise on hand, what per cent is safe and adequate for sales promotion. And these, by the way, are but two of *scores* of percentage-figures wherewith he points the way to successful operation.

He knows the intricacies of government taxation.

He knows how to *survey* the transactions of a business over a given period; how to show in cold, hard figures the progress it has made and where it is going. He knows how to *use* these findings as a basis for constructive policies.

In short, the trained accountant is the *controlling engineer* of business—one man business cannot do without.

Small wonder that he commands a salary two to ten times as great as that of the bookkeeper. Indeed, as an independent operator (head of his own accounting firm) he may earn as much as the president of the big and influential bank in his community, or the operating manager of a great railroad.



Some Examples

Small wonder that accountancy offers the trained man such fine opportunities—opportunities well illustrated by the success of thousands of LaSalle accountancy students.* For example—one man was a plumber, 32 years old, with only an eleventh grade education. He became auditor for a large bank with an income 325 per cent larger.

Another was a drug clerk at $30 a week. Now he heads his own very successful accounting firm with an income several times as large.

A woman bookkeeper—buried in details of a small job—is now auditor of an apartment hotel, and her salary mounted in proportion to her work.

A credit manager—earning $200 a month—moved up quickly to $3000, to $5000, and then to a highly profitable accounting business of his own which netted around $10,000 a year.

And What It Means to You

Why let the other fellow walk away with the better job, when right in your own home you may equip yourself for a splendid future in this profitable profession?

Are you really *determined* to get ahead? If so, you can start at once to acquire—by the LaSalle Problem Method—a thorough understanding of Higher Accountancy, master its fundamental principles, become expert in the practical application of those principles—this without losing an hour from work or a dollar of pay.

Preliminary knowledge of bookkeeping is unnecessary. You will be given whatever training, instruction or review on the subject of bookkeeping you may personally need—and without any extra expense to you.

If you are dissatisfied with your present equipment—if you recognize the opportunities that lie ahead of you through home-study training — you will do well to send at once for full particulars. The coupon will bring them to you without any obligation, also details of LaSalle's convenient payment plan.

Check, sign and mail the coupon NOW.

LaSalle Extension University

A Correspondence Institution

DEPT. 5329-HR CHICAGO

Opportunities in Accountancy — Check below and we will send you a copy of "Accountancy, the Profession that Pays," without obligation.

☐ **Higher Accountancy:**

Other LaSalle Opportunities: If more interested in one of the other fields of business indicated below, check here:

☐ Business Management	☐ Commercial Law
☐ Modern Salesmanship	☐ Modern Foremanship
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Expert Bookkeeping
☐ Law: Degree of LL. B.	☐ C. P. A. Coaching
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Business English
☐ Business Correspondence	☐ Stenotypy

☐ Effective Speaking

Name ..... Age .....

Present Position .....

Address .....

*Names available on request.

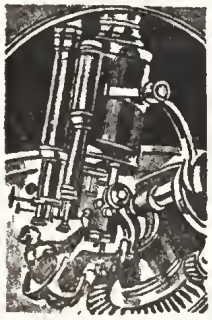
☆ THE BEST IN SCIENTIFICTION ☆

STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 7, No. 3 CONTENTS May, 1942

A Complete Book-Length Scientifiction Novel

BLOOD ON THE SUN



By

HAL K. WELLS

The Ancient Brain-Destroyers Prepare to Use the Bodies of Mankind for Their Own Sinister Purposes and Few Are Aware of the Threatening Menace! 14

Other Unusual Stories

ALLA-BEG'S GENII ..... Richard O. Lewis 89
A Crooked Magician Plays with the Wrong Dimension

MACROCOSMIC ..... G. L. Maddocks 103
Jim Hughes Is Resurrected from an Atom and a Drop of Water

THE MAKING OF MISTY ISLE ..... Stanton A. Coblentz 112
An Outstanding Classic from Scientifiction's Hall of Fame

Special Features

THE ETHER VIBRATES ..... Announcements and Letters 6

THRILLS IN SCIENCE ..... Oscar J. Friend 99

SCIENCE QUESTION BOX ..... Answers to Queries 111

REVIEW OF FAN PUBLICATIONS ..... Sergeant Saturn 126

Cover Painting by Earle K. Bergey—Illustrating BLOOD ON THE SUN

STARTLING STORIES, published bi-monthly by Better Publications, Inc., N. L. Pines, President, at 4600 Diversey Ave., Chicago, Ill. Editorial and executive offices, 10 East 40th St., New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter September 29, 1938, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1942, by Better Publications, Inc. Yearly (6 issues $.90, single copies $.15; foreign and Canadian postage extra. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If a name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

Companion magazines: Thrilling Wonder Stories, Captain Futuro, Popular Western, Thrilling Mystery, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Adventures, Thrilling Love, The Phantom Detective, The American Eagle, RAF Aces, Sky Fighters, Popular Detective, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Sports, Popular Sports Magazine, Range Riders Western, Texas Rangers, Everyday Astrology, G-Men Detective, Detective Novels Magazine, Black Book Detective, Popular Love, Masked Rider Western, Rio Kid Western, Air War, The Masked Detective, Exciting Detective, Exciting Western, Exciting Love, Exciting Navy Stories, Thrilling Football, Exciting Football, Rodeo Romances and West. PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

HE'S A TRAINED MAN!

★ The importance of *sound training* is dramatically illustrated by America's fighting airmen.

But trained men in uniform can't win this war *alone.* They must be backed up by trained men on the industrial front—trained men to keep 'em *flying,* keep 'em *rolling,* keep 'em *sailing!*

Now's the time for *you* to get the training that will make you a better fighter on the battlefield of production! For a few dollars a month, you can study an I. C. S. Course in your line of work, and acquire sound, practical *training-for-success.* Mail this coupon for complete information, without obligation. Mail it *today!*

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

HELPING TO TRAIN AMERICANS FOR VICTORY

BOX 3968-U, SCRANTON, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Air Brake
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Airplane Drafting
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Auto Engine Tune-up
- ☐ Auto Technician
- ☐ Aviation ☐ Aviation Mechanic
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Bridge Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Concrete Engineering
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Foundryman ☐ Heating
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ House Planning
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Machinist
- ☐ Management of Inventions
- ☐ Marine Engines
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mine Foreman
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Patternmaking ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Public Works Engineering
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ R. R. Section Foreman
- ☐ R. R. Signalman ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Sheet Metal Work
- ☐ Ship Drafting
- ☐ Shipfitting ☐ Shop Practice
- ☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engines
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking ☐ Welding
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

BUSINESS COURSES

- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Cartooning ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Commercial Illustrating
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ C. P. Accounting
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship ☐ French
- ☐ Good English
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Managing Men at Work
- ☐ Railway Postal Clerk
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Secretarial ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Showcard and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Traffic Management

HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

- ☐ Advanced Dressmaking
- ☐ Foods and Cookery
- ☐ Home Dressmaking
- ☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing
- ☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England

TALK about your Einsteinian theories, your time machines, and the exploits of Captain Future—you kiwis haven't seen anything or been anywhere until you make the next spatial voyage in the good ship STARTLING STORIES with Pilot Noel Loomis. And what a job of piloting: Author Loomis starts with such a gentle acceleration that even the old Sarge didn't know he was off the Earth until—zowie!

Next issue CITY OF GLASS is the full book-length novel which makes up the bulk of our cargo. It begins with a refugee on a park bench somewhere in the United States of the present time. Just a hungry refugee who wants a Porterhouse steak. But Hart Niles is far more than a hapless victim of the European turmoil; he is another Einstein of sorts. And when he gets tangled up with Dr. Beckwith, the mild little scientist who is experimenting with rocket flight, and they make a trip out into the void—just a short jaunt of 800,000 years! —they return to an amazing world of glass cities and silicon men.

And this is just the beginning of a series of scientific adventures which will remind you of TARNISHED UTOPIA, while being an altoegther different type of story. But the old space dog is not going to spoil things for you by going into details. Just tune in on your viso-plates next issue and take a reading for yourselves. THE CITY OF GLASS, by Noel Loomis, is another epic yarn you are going to remember a long time.

HALL OF FAME CLASSIC

THERE is a darb of a Hall of Fame yarn scheduled to go along with it. THE MARBLE VIRGIN, by Kennie McDowd, is a classic you won't want to miss.

By the way, how about some of you senior pee-lots writing in and asking for a Hall of Fame favorite! The commander —editor, to you literal-minded birds—tells the old Sarge he is open to suggestions.

ETHERGRAMS

Before we get on to the asbestos-lined mail bag, here's an announcement or rather, a statement of policy from the Futurian Society of New York. The old Sarge is glad to receive and include such things in this department.

The Futurian Society of New York declares its unswerving sympathy and loyalty to the great struggle being carried on by four-fifths of the population of Earth, headed by the alliance of the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China, against the barbarian thrust of the Nazi-Fascist-Japanese Axis. It makes this declaration in the firm conviction that the further progress of science and civilization, upon which the dreams and visions of science-fiction are mainly based, is dependent entirely upon an Allied victory. The shape of the Future is being decided on the field of battle of the Present. Science-fiction readers, writers, and enthusiasts have no other possible choice but to do all in their power to aid and speed the triumph of civilization over fascism. To this end, the Futurian Society appeals to all other science-fiction clubs, publications, and readers to issue similar declarations and to do all in their power to help the United States to absolute victory.—John B. Michel, Director.

A ray-gun salute to the Futurian Society. A little more of this sort of moral belt-tightening is what this country needs. Which reminds me—I had dinner the other night with Lieutenant Malcolm Jameson of the U. S. N., retired, and we sort of took international politics to pieces and put them back together again.

Malcolm—Jamie, Mrs. Jameson calls him—had a trunkful of maps on the Pacific area and a complete file of ten years of service orders he had received. A pretty husky assortment of autographs, by the way. Anyway, over the finest Mexican-style dinner you'd ever hope to see outside of Mexico, we went to bat for the navy and the army and the air force. Sure, Pearl Harbor was bad, but just watch and see the praise and credit and medals which will be passed out over that unfortunate business. They'll outstrip censure and blame at least twenty to one.

This department being no place for military discussion of tactics, the old space dog won't clutter things up. But you kiwis—and others—just hold back on your acceleration jets and wait until you hear the whole story before you form any snap judgments or offer any harsh criticisms.

Malcolm Jameson? Of course, he's the author of TARNISHED UTOPIA—and maybe I don't have a chorus of yapping space devils in this issue's mail pouch. Get back in line, you pee-lots, and quit shoving, or the old Sarge will pin your ears back. We'll tune in on the wild etherwaves one station at a time.

PRINCELY POETRY

By Paul Carter

Dear Sarge:

This is your space-mad correspondent reporting from his cage again. Once again STARTLING STORIES has visited the local space-station, and I pick up my quill (genuine Martian Green Turkey tail-feather), dip it in skitar blood, and prepare to "write" (?)

(Continued on page 12)

Learning Radio at Home Jumped My $17 a Week to $45

BY G.A.M.

(NAME AND ADDRESS UPON REQUEST)

Here's How I Won Success in Radio

"When I enrolled with N. R. I., I was employed in an insurance company at $17 a week. I decided to do something about my future. I read about the National Radio Institute, and enrolled for the N. R. I. Course. The Course was so practical I was soon ready to make $5 to $10 a week extra in spare time servicing Radio Sets.

WAS RADIO SERVICE MANAGER—

"When I graduated I secured a job with the largest Chevrolet Dealer in New England as Radio Service Manager. In one year I installed 452 new Radios in cars, to say nothing of the number of Radios I changed from old cars to new, and my Radio service work.

OPENED OWN BUSINESS—

"I then opened my own Radio business and my earnings now average around $45 a week. I have more than doubled my pay, thanks to N. R. I. I am now taking care of service on Radios and Public Address Systems. We also do sound work for State of Connecticut. I recommend the N. R. I. Course to anyone interested in making more money in a fascinating field with a future." (Signed) G. A. M.

You Have the Same Opportunity to Win Good Pay in Radio

If you want better pay quick, and a job in a field with a future, take a tip from G. A. M.—and investigate the N. R. I. Course NOW. I offer you a time-tested practical way to make $5, $10 extra in spare time starting in a few months, and to prepare for a good full time job paying up to $50 a week as a Radio Technician or Radio Operator.

Why Many Radio Technicians I Train Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

The 882 broadcasting stations in the U. S. employ thousands of Radio Technicians with average pay among the country's best paid industries. The Radio repair business is booming due to shortage of new sets. Repairing, servicing, selling home and auto Radio receivers (there are 50,197,000 in use) gives jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take advantage of the opportunities to have their own Radio service businesses. The Government needs many Civilian Radio Operators, Technicians. Think of the many good pay jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N. R. I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for these jobs. N. R. I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Yes, Radio Technicians make good money because they use their heads as well as their hands. They must be trained.

Beginners Quickly Learn to Earn $5, $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time

Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable practical experience. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

Find Out How I Train You For Good Pay in Radio

Mail the coupon below. I'll send my 64-page book FREE. It tells about my Course; the types of jobs in the different branches of Radio; shows letters from more than 100 of the men I trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postal.

J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 2EO9, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

Extra Pay in Army, Navy, Too

Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to 6 times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW!

THIS FREE BOOK HAS SHOWN HUNDREDS HOW TO MAKE GOOD MONEY

Mr. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2E09,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Send me the FREE 64-page book which helped G. A. M. jump his pay to $45 a week. I want to know about Radio's opportunities. (No salesman will call—write plainly.)

Name ..... Age.....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

YOUR WHOLE FAMILY
insured up to
$3,000.00
maximum

The Murray Family
4712 Leamington Ave., Chicago

Now, at last, YOU may insure your whole family—all of them with one policy! Insures entire family—husband and wife, the babies, children, grandparents—ages 1 to 75.

One of the Most Sensational Offers Made to Our Readers by the Famous Bankers Life & Casualty Company

Here, at last, is insurance for *your whole family* at a bargain price that you never thought possible. This amazing new Triple Benefit low cost Family Group Life Policy insures the whole family—ages 1 to 75—*without medical examination!*

Chartered under strict Illinois Insurance Laws, you now get SAFE, RELIABLE insurance in a strong, well established insurance company with an outstanding record for prompt payment of benefits. Don't delay! Mail coupon at once for amazing Free Inspection offer.

ONLY 25¢ PER WEEK

—the cost of the policy is amazingly low, only $1.00 a month for the whole family. Surely you can set aside 25c a week to insure your family.

As Plainly Stated in the Policy

YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY IS INSURED UP TO:

$1,000.00
MAXIMUM—For Natural Death

$2,000.00
MAXIMUM—For Auto Accidental Death

$3,000.00
MAXIMUM—For Travel Accidental Death

The fact that the company pays one death claim does not cancel the policy. It remains in force on the balance of the family as long as premiums are paid. Monthly premiums are divided equally between the number insured and benefits are graded according to the attained ages of members insured.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION

You can get this wonderful, liberal, safe TRIPLE BENEFIT Family Policy with printed guarantee for 10 Days without obligation. You can read the policy in your own home. No agent or collector will call. You alone decide and if you are not 100% satisfied simply send the policy back.

Here is our sensational offer. Send No Money. Mail the Coupon *now!* Examine the policy on our 10 Day Free Inspection offer. No embarrassing medical examination. No obligation to keep the policy if you aren't entirely satisfied.

SAFE, RELIABLE COMPANY

OVER $18,000,000.00 INSURANCE SOLD WITHOUT AN AGENT—ADMITTED ASSETS AT NEW ALL-TIME HIGH!

This company owns its OWN BUILDING . . . has thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars of free surplus, and its entire reserve is invested in U. S. Government Bonds. *This is the great advertised Company that has issued more Family Group insurance policies than any other insurance company in the world.* Truly, a good, safe investment for you.

SEND NO MONEY

10-Day FREE Policy Inspection Offer

Take your insurance out in a company in which you have faith and confidence. (Look at our high rating in lower left corner). We don't ask you to send a penny with the coupon—you risk nothing. Just mail coupon for full details and 10 Day Free Inspection offer. No Agent will call—no obligation.

NO AGENT WILL CALL
You deal direct and save money!
JUST MAIL COUPON

Awarded Highest Rating A+ *(Excellent)*

. . . by Dunne's Insurance Report, the largest policyholders reporting service in the world. They state: "We conclude that Bankers Life & Casualty Company, Chicago, is entirely worthy of the public's confidence and so recommend it." June 30, 1941.

This is the highest rating that can be given any insurance company

MAIL COUPON *NOW!*

Mail the coupon now—it's free and does not obligate you. You may examine this triple benefit family policy on our 10 Day Free Inspection Offer—now offered by a big, sound, stable, reliable company. Send coupon today sure!

THIS COUPON IS FREE

BANKERS LIFE AND CASUALTY CO.
Bankers Insurance Building
Jefferson Sta. Desk 15-B
Chicago, Illinois

10-DAY FREE OFFER
Send No Money, No Agent Will Call

Without cost or obligation, send Free details of the Family Group Policy and your 10-Day Free Offer.

Name.....

Street or R. F. D.....

City.....State.....

NO OBLIGATION TO KEEP THIS POLICY!

"Weakling!"

...that's what they called ME when I was only 97 pounds of skin and bones. NOW look at this build that won me the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"➡

CHARLES ATLAS
An actual, unchanged photograph of the winner and holder of the title, "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

"I'll Prove that YOU, too, can be a NEW MAN!"
— *Charles Atlas*

"WEAKLING!" "*Sissy!*" "RUNT!" Those are just some of the names the gang used to call me. And believe me, they *hurt*. Those names hurt me more than any punches ever could. I used to wish they *would* hit me, instead of jeer and laugh at my skinny, no-muscle physique. Bnt I deserved it, all right. Just 97 pounds of skin and bones! No strength, no stamina. I couldn't pnnch my way out of a paper bag. I was ashamed, embarrassed when I had to strip for gym or the beach. I felt HALF-ALIVE.

But I began to *study* my body—and then I made my amazing discovery of "*Dynamic Tension!*" And that's what made me a NEW MAN. It gave me the powerfnl body you see here! And it won for me the title, "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man!"

Only 15 Minutes a Day

I want to prove that "*Dynamic Tension*" (in 15 minutes a day, right in your own home) CAN MAKE YOU OVER into a man of giant strength and lasting energy. A confident, healthy, big-muscled HE-MAN! I can give you trigger-action muscles in your arms and legs and shoulders; set your whole body alive with rohust, red-hlooded health! What makes me so sure? Because I've seen my method of "*Dynamic Tension*" transform hundreds of puny weaklings—like I *used* to be—into champion SUPERMEN! I've got their letters and their measurements and their *pictures* in my files—and I know!

Do YOU want a pair of arms with the crushing power of steel trip-hammers—a surging, muscular barrel chest—shoulders like a hrawny hlacksmith's? Do yon want a muscle-ridged stomach that can TAKE it? Do you want the tireless staying-power of a hulldog—the energy and pep of a terrier? Do you want the successful, self-confident kind of life that goes with a manly, fearless physique? "*Dynamic Tension*" is what you need! Let me PROVE that it can make you into a man of MIGHT and MUSCLE!

The Results YOU Want —FAST!

Yes—just give "*Dynamic Tension*" 15 minutes a day, in the privacy of yonr own home. You'll see real muscle-results—FAST! And it's fun—no backbreaking work, no trick diets, pills, or gadgets. "*Dynamic Tension*" does the work. It simply helps you to build the kind of clean, strong, muscular body that God intended you to have! There's no magic about "*Dynamic Tension.*" But it certainly puts the muscles on—and right in the places you want them!

Send For My FREE BOOK

"Everlasting Health and Strength"

If yon mail the coupon right away, I'll send yon a copy of my brand-new book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells the story of "*Dynamic Tension*" in 48 pages of straight-from-the-shoulder, man-to-man talk, and over 75 actual pictures of myself and my pupils—fellows who became NEW MEN. My book worked wonders for them. See what it can do for you, RIGHT NOW. Remember, it's FREE. Mail the coupon TODAY. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77T, 115 East 23rd St., New York. N. Y.

Mail This Coupon For FREE BOOK

CHARLES ATLAS,
Dept. 77T, 115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.

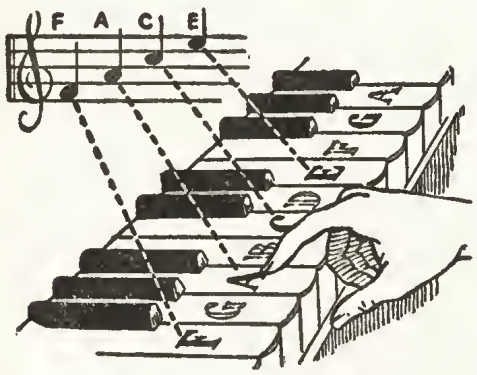
I want the proof that your system of "*Dynamic Tension*" can help make me a New Man—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your FREE book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

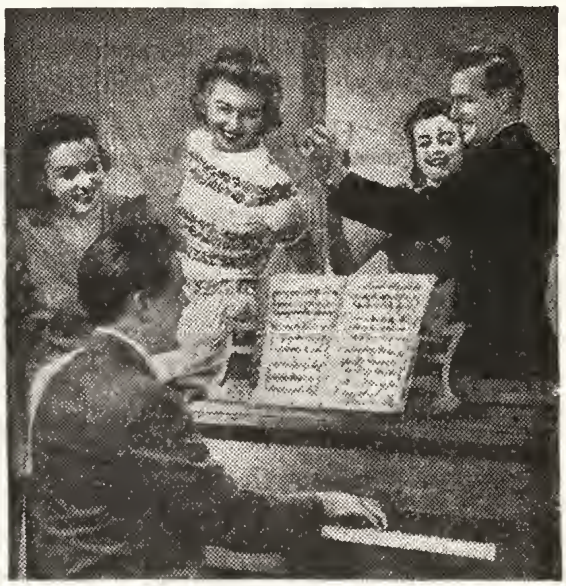
Over 700,000 people
have studied music this easy way



Easy as A-B-C

This Print and Picture Way

YES, OVER 700,000 delighted people have studied music this quick, easy, inexpensive way. Some are now on the stage, others on the radio, and thousands more are enjoying new pleasure and popularity by being able to play. Isn't this convincing proof of the success of the new U. S. School of Music method? Many students didn't know one note from another. Yet in a short time they learned to play their favorite instrument. And they found learning this modern way amazingly easy, and loads of fun. What countless others have done, YOU, too can do!

Right from the start you learn real tunes by note. First you are *told* how to do a thing. Then a picture *shows* you how to do it. Finally you do it yourself and *hear* how it goes. Almost before you realize it, you are playing your favorite pieces. No private teacher could make it clearer.

FREE BOOKLET EXPLAINS ALL

Best of all it costs less than 7¢ a day. That includes everything . . . *no extras* of any kind. Don't miss any more fun. Learn to play your favorite instrument and surprise your friends. Music, you know, makes most any party a success. Those who can play are invited everywhere. So get started on the way to musical good times *NOW!*

If you want to be a "hit" at every party . . . if you really *do* want to play your favorite instrument . . . fill out and mail the coupon below, asking for our Free Illustrated Booklet and Print and Picture Sample. These show you how quickly and easily you can learn music in your own home at little cost. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 2945 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

(Established 1898 — 44th year.)

SUCCESS!

Well Worth Money

The course is fully self-explanatory. When one is finished with it there is little one need learn. It is well worth the money.

**R.E.G.,*
Clarksburg, W. Va.

Enjoyed Learning

I could never tell you how much I've enjoyed practicing my lessons. If it hadn't been for your easy payment plan, I could never have procured a course.

**S.E.C.,*
Altoona, Pa.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

U. S. School of Music
2945 Brunswick Bldg., New York, N. Y.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home" and your free Print and Picture Sample.

(Do you have instrument?..... Do you have phonograph?.....)

Piano	'Cello	Trombone
Violin	Hawaiian Guitar	Trumpet
Piano Accordion	Tenor Banjo	Ukulele
Plain Accordion	Mandolin	Modern Elementary Harmony
Saxophone	Cornet	

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

☐ Check here if under 16 years of age.

SAVE 2¢ — STICK COUPON ON PENNY POSTCARD.

Get into our MOST IMPORTANT war production

500,000 More Men Needed for 185,000 Plane Program

Our country's "No. 1" war cry is "More, and More, and Still More Fighting Planes." Victory will be determined in the air. Your most important patriotic duty—outside of battling on the firing line—is to help assure our "Wings of Victory." YOU can help design and engineer these tens of thousands of fighting planes... help build them... or help maintain them in fighting trim.

This war brings the greatest opportunity of your entire lifetime...the opportunity to become a man trained to be of vital importance to your country, and, at the same time, trained for a good job and a secure, successful future in the great peacetime aviation industry ahead. Find out how these rewards can be yours through *Aero Tech* training under supervision of top-ranking aircraft industry executives.

Read what authorities say about why the aircraft industry MUST have men...

"America's strength and skill must be changed over from peacetime work...to the making of planes and tanks and guns and ships."
(Published in "Our America")

"To win the Battle For Freedom we must first win the Battle for Production...Soldiers of freedom are to be found in overalls as well as in khaki."
(From "Our America")

"...officials recognize the need for from 14 to 20 workers behind each fighting man."
(From the "United States News")

"...the aircraft industry will be the first to feel the surge of new employment and it...will be undertaken immediately to raise the number of aircraft workers to well above the million mark."
(From "Aviation News")

START 'EM FLYING — 4000 Aero Tech Trained Men — KEEP 'EM FLYING

GET THIS FREE BOOKLET!

It answers the many questions bound to be in your mind about where you stand in relation to the war...about how you can help yourself and your country at the same time. You will have your copy in just a few days by sending the coupon airmail NOW.

aero tech Aero Industries Technical Institute

5227 West San Fernando Road
Los Angeles, California

5 Career Courses In
AIRCRAFT MECHANICS and AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING
—Including 12 Month Aircraft Mechanics Course
Approved by U. S. Civil Aeronautics Administration

Executive Management Board

ROBERT E. GROSS	JOHN K. NORTHROP	C. A. VAN DUSEN
President, Lockheed Aircraft Corporation	*President Northrop Aircraft, Inc.*	*Vice Pres., Consolidated Aircraft Corporation*

Airmail This Coupon NOW

Aero Industries Technical Institute
5227 West San Fernando Road, Los Angeles, California

Please send my free copy of the booklet and complete information on aircraft training valuable to my country and myself. I am interested in ☐ Aeronautical Engineering, ☐ Aircraft Mechanics (Aircraft Plant), ☐ Airplane and Engine Maintenance (Airline or Civil Service).

Name_____ Age_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ a-2-TH

A KEY TO SHOP PRACTICE
For Every Machinist, Toolmaker, Machine Operator; Draughtsman, Metal Worker, Mechanic or Student. Covers Shop Practice in All Branches.

A READY REFERENCE
Tells How to Operate and Set Up Lathes, Screw and Milling Machines, Shapers, Drill Presses and All Machine Tools.

5 PRACTICAL BOOKS IN ONE!
60 FULLY ILLUSTRATED CHAPTERS
Covering: 1—Modern Machine Shop Practice. 2—Blue Print Reading and How to Draw. 3—Calculations & Mathematics for Machinists. 4—Shop Physics. 5—How to Use Slide Rule.

Get This Information for Yourself. Mail Coupon Today. No Obligation Unless Satisfied. ASK TO SEE IT.

1600 PAGES FULLY ILLUSTRATED — **$4** COMPLETE • PAY ONLY $1 MO.

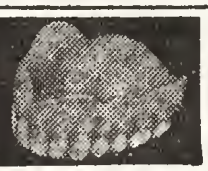
THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 WEST 23rd STREET, NEW YORK
Mail AUDELS MACHINISTS & TOOLMAKERS HANDY BOOK. Price $4 on 7 Days Free Trial. If O. K. I will remit $1 in 7 days and $1 monthly until $4 is paid. Otherwise I will return it.

Name_____
Address_____
Occupation_____
Reference_____ FAL

FREE! $5.00 Full Size FOOD & HOUSEHOLD PRODUCT ASST.

Send No Money! Rush name and address for big Assortment of FOODS, GROCERIES, SOAPS, Etc.—full size packages, worth $5.00. Yours ABSOLUTELY FREE! Show these products to friends, neighbors. Take orders for sensational values, more than 200 quality products used in every home. Earn big profits, full or spare time. No experience necessary. Write for FREE $5.00 Assortment of Products NOW. ZANOL, 4995 Monmouth, Cincinnati, O.

FALSE TEETH



MADE FROM YOUR OWN MOUTH IMPRESSION
SEND NO MONEY! If you are looking for real quality false teeth by mail at low cost, WRITE TODAY for FREE IMPRESSION MATERIAL and circular showing a wide range of styles, LOW Prices and quality materials. **MONEY BACK If Not Satisfied. 60-Days' Wearing Trial!** Many satisfied customers. Write Today! **WARD DENTAL LABORATORY** 936 W. 63rd Street, Dept. 26-E, Chicago, Illinois

90 Days' Trial — $7

DRESSES 10¢ • SHOES 25¢ • 110 OTHER BARGAINS
Men's suits $2.00. Men's felt hats 35¢. Bargains for entire family. Send post card for free catalog. PROGRESSIVE SALES, 207 Thatford Ave., Dept. FL, Brooklyn, N. Y.

MUSIC COMPOSED TO POEMS

Phonograph Recording FREE if poem accepted. Send poem for consideration. Rhyming pamphlet free. **Phonograph electrical transcriptions made,** $7.00 from your word and music manuscript. Any subject considered, Patriotic, Love, Home, Sacred, Swing.

KEENAN'S MUSIC SERVICE
Box 2140 (Dept. TF) Bridgeport, Conn.

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

Ah! What is the unusual feature—the strange phenomenon—the Xeno vision—which greets my eyes? Why, it's none other than our old friend BERGEY, no less! The cover is actually **good**, for a change! The red color has graduated to the BEMs, where it really belonged in the first place. And besides, it isn't the same red—it is actually a nice red.

And furthermore, except for the hero's gun (should be an axe) THE COVER IS ACCURATE!

I relax limply on the floor of my cage, resolving never to touch a drop again. After a while, realizing I am actually sober—and the cover is still accurate—I pull my shattered wits together. There is hope for the Jolly S. S. yet!

The best thing in the issue is the poem on page 84. I rate that separately from the story. "Her breath is purest methane gas . . . with pseudopods for feet"—Wow! Dish up some more space-ballads. Doesn't Captain Future have any more in his musical repertoire? Anyway, "The Ballad of the Martian Glamour Girl," or whatever you want to call it, rates tops with me. Mr. Business Manager, issue five Xeno jugs to Malcolm Jameson "for extraordinary services rendered."

By the way, Jameson rates some more Xeno for the story, which takes second place. (Boy, is that author going to be plastered!)

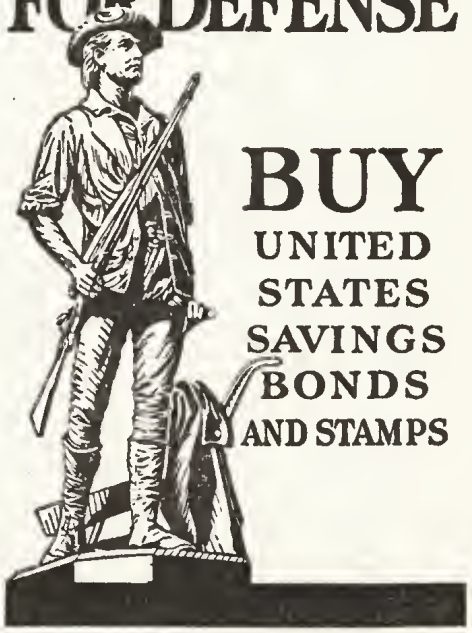
Serve out four Xeno jugs to each of the other three authors.

Third, comes Starzl—nice space-adventure; not "classic," but quite refreshing in contrast to the average "refined" Space Yarn of today. Next, Kuttner—swell idea, swell story. And last, Millard—though if the end hadn't been dangled in mid-air, this little tale would have outranked even Starzl. If you would be so kind as to provide a sequel, such an event might still happen—better late than never, you know.

You say you still want a "big vote and a sterling letter of nomination" for something for the Hall of Fame. Well, let's see. How much Weinbaum have you published? About four, not counting "Black Flame." Well, let's have some more. Ah, yes; and John Taine—but I mentioned him last time. Well, maybe you can go ahead on that basis.

(Continued on page 119)

FOR DEFENSE



BUY UNITED STATES SAVINGS BONDS AND STAMPS

How Little Mistakes in Eating Can Keep You Half-Sick

WHICH DO YOU SUFFER FROM?

Dietary Indigestion—Heartburn

He is one of the countless people who suffers needlessly from dietary stomach disorders. Chapter 7 of Victor H. Lindlahr's great book shows a way to quick relief and prevention for thousands.

Common Rheumatism and Arthritis

He suffers from rhaumatic pains largely because of simple mistakes in his diet. If he follows the suggestion on page eight of Victor H. Lindlahr's remarkable book he should get quick relief.

Excess Weight

She could reduce in no time, yet actually eat more food than she does now . . . if she only ate properly. *"You Are What You Eat"* would tell her how.

Frequent Colds

She is an easy victim of coughs and colds. Something vital is lacking in her diet. What? Read the first chapter of *"You Are What You Eat"* to see how easy it should be to put her on the road to strength and health.

Learn How to Eat Your Way to Better Health

HERE, AT LAST, is Victor H. Lindlahr's remarkable method of health through diet brought to you in a big, fascinating book—at a price so low everyone can own it! In just one evening, you can learn how to *correct* mistakes in eating that may have been keeping you below par . . . you may learn how to be healthier, *happier* by following the *proven* principles of health through diet in Victor H. Lindlahr's remarkable book, *"You Are What You Eat."*

Do you know how you may improve your complexion by a simple change in diet? Do you know what high-vitamin fruits and vegetables will help build you up when you are run-down? Do you know what foods often help promote sound, restful sleep? Do you know what methods of cooking destroy the chief value of certain foods? Do you know what vegetables can help in building better blood?

Let Victor H. Lindlahr help you and your family gain better health through diet. It has been done in thousands of cases. It is being done every day!

Don't Let Little Mistakes In Eating Rob You of Good Health

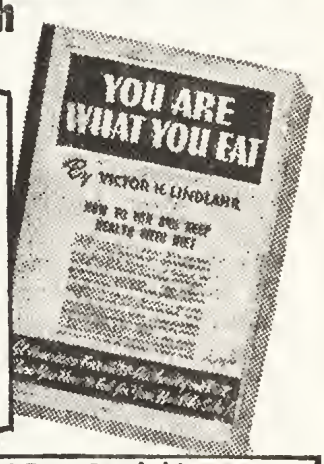
Foods are medicine . . . and Victor H. Lindlahr knows that foods have the power that may give you freedom from many common symptoms. Out of the kitchen can come meals to help put an end to many of your distressing troubles. Yes, foods often possess a remarkable power for improving health—and now Victor H. Lindlahr shows you how to use this power!

FORMERLY $2.50

NOW ONLY 98¢

—send no money!

Just mail the coupon. You will receive Victor H. Lindlahr's book by return mail. When it comes pay the postman 98c, plus a few cents postage. If at the end of 5 days you aren't thrilled—return the book and your money will be refunded without question. Mail the coupon NOW.



ACT NOW! Send this coupon —5-day free trial

JOURNAL OF LIVING PUB. CORP.
Dept. M-13, Carlton Ave., Jersey City, N. J.

Send me Victor H. Lindlahr's Book, *"You Are What You Eat,"* for only 98c, plus a few cents postage. I understand that if not delighted I may return the book within 5 days and my money will be refunded.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

NOTE: If apt to be out when postman calls, send $1.00 with coupon and save C.O.D postage.

BLOOD *on the* SUN

By HAL K. WELLS

Author of "The White Brood," "Moon of Mad Atavism," etc.

The Ancient Brain-Destroyers Prepare to Use the Bodies of Mankind for Their Own Sinister Purposes and Few Are Aware of the Threatening Menace!

CHAPTER I

Red Clouds Over Mars

THE signal buzzer of the visiphone beside Val X. Barnes' bed sounded for several minutes before it finally ground its way through the deep slumber shrouding Barnes' brain.

He groaned in heartfelt protest and reluctantly opened eyelids that felt as if they weighed ten Terrestrial pounds. His gaze met utter blackness. Something was pressed smotheringly over his face, oddly muffling the sound of the visiphone buzzer.

Panic momentarily struck Barnes. He raised a hand to his face, then relaxed in sheepish relief. Nothing was wrong except that he had his head under the pillow instead of upon it.

He impatiently flung the pillow aside and blinked, trying to find out where he was. At first the small, dimly lighted room seemed completely unfamiliar. Then memory returned.

He had been in the interior of Titan's wild North Continent, covering the small but interesting war there for the Stellar Telenews Syndicate and the five hundred odd telenews sheets throughout the System that subscribed to the releases of that great news-gathering organization. Then Gallard's etheradio message had ordered him to board the Saturn-to-Mars spaceliner *Empress of Mars,* and report at once to the Syndicate's branch headquarters in the Martian city of Anzoc.

Gallard's message had given no details, but Barnes knew that some story must be breaking on Mars too big to be handled by the Bureau's resident staff. There was no false modesty about Val X. Barnes. He was the Stellar Syndicate's Number One boy, and he knew it.

The insistent, nagging buzz of the visiphone signal dragged Barnes' thoughts back to the present. He sat up in bed and groped through the gloom for the contact stud.

The pertly pretty, doll-like face of one of the *Empress of Mars'* operators glowed softly on the instrument's foot-square screen.

"Mr. Gilbert Gallard, calling from Anzoc, Mars, wishes to speak to Mr. Val X. Barnes," she said sweetly.

"Put the old buzzard on," Barnes grunted.

"Mr. Gallard specified that definite visual contact must be made. Please turn on more light in your room."

Barnes fumbled for the wall-switch at the head of the bed. Pure and glareless artificial sunlight flooded the place.

"Oh, Mr. Barnes!" the operator gasped. A rosy blush stained the pertly pretty face in the visiphone screen.

Barnes grinned. "The *Empress of Mars* must have a singularly effete clientele, darling, if I am the first male you ever saw who sleeps in pajama lowers only. Put Mr. Gallard on, please. I'm sure he won't blush."

There was the click of the connections being made. The operator's face vanished and in its place appeared another and much less attractive visage.

"There is the most marvelously conceived piece of apparatus I have ever seen!" Ramsey said
(Chapter XV)

Illustrations by VIRGIL FINLAY

Val X. Barnes

Gilbert Gallard, Chief of the Mars Bureau of the Stellar Syndicate, was florid, fat, and fifty. Years of dealing with the unpredictable vagaries of interplanetary correspondents in general, and of Val X. Barnes in particular, had long since soured whatever milk of human kindness may once have run in the Gallard veins.

His protruding eyes, squat nose, and thin, wide mouth gave him a facial expression suggesting an intelligent and irascible frog. The resemblance was heightened by the rasping croak that substituted for a voice.

"Ah!" he greeted Barnes caustically. "The genus correspondent in its native habitat! Do all of you tramps spend all of your time in bed?"

"It was a stormy night last night, sweetheart," Barnes answered soothingly.

"It probably was. I suppose your little pen pals back on Titan poured you on board in the usual saturated condition of the profession?"

"They did," Barnes agreed, "and a very nice send-off party it was. So what? You're not running up visiphone tolls just to chide me on my personal habits. Give out."

"Are you alone?"

"I think so. I haven't looked under the bed yet."

"All right. Here it is." Gallard's voice dropped to as near a whisper as its croaking timbre could manage. "You walked right into something when you booked passage on the *Empress of Mars*. We just got a straight tip that between now and the time you arrive in Anzoc something is going to break there on the ship, something big enough to splash scare heads on every telesheet in the System."

The lazy banter dropped abruptly from Barnes' voice.

"What kind of a break?" he clipped.

"The tip didn't say."

"Know who might be involved?"

"Haven't any idea."

"Tied up in any way with the reason for your calling me in to Mars?"

"Probably, but I wouldn't know definitely. I've given you all we've got."

"A fat lot it is!" Barnes said disgustedly. He glanced at the time indicator below the visiphone screen. "We're less than seven Terrestrial hours out of Anzoc now, and there are at least six hundred passengers on this space-wagon from every globe in the Solar System. Sometime during the next seven hours something is going to happen somewhere on board to somebody. Fooey! You don't want a reporter, Gil. You want a Venusian magician with a large crystalite globe."

"I can tell you one thing, sonny boy," Gallard said pointedly. "I don't think the story will break there in your snug little boudoir."

"I catch. Okay. I'll get out and prowl. I presume I have a pair of pants somewhere on board."

GALLARD stopped him as he made a move to hang up.

"Just a minute," Gallard said. "There's one more thing that might interest you. You're not the only correspondent on the *Empress of Mars*. The Cosmic Syndicate is bringing in their ace reporter to cover the Martian situation. She joined you at the Jupiter junction stop."

"She?" Barnes exclaimed.

"Yeah. A little gal by the name of Amber Starr. Cosmic's well publicized 'Golden Girl of the Spaceways.' Also known as the 'Blond Bombshell.' If she's even half as good as she's supposed to be you'll have all the competition you can handle."

"Competition from that taffy-headed concocter of bedtime hobgoblin yarns?" Barnes raved. "Listen, Gil, if I ever get to the place where any lantern-jawed, bespectacled little male impersonator can scoop me on a yarn I'll retire to Titan's Wistful Valley and start raising star-tulips for the spring tourist trade."

"You've never met Miss Starr, have you?"

"No, I've never had that pleasure. Nor have I ever had smallpox, Jovian ague, or Venusian swamp itch."

"Tch, tch!" Gallard said mockingly. "What an interesting experience you're going to have, sonny boy!"

Gallard's froglike features vanished as he broke the connection. Barnes glared at the blank screen for a moment, then got out of bed. He crossed the room to a full-length wall-mirror and speculatively studied the figure reflected there.

What he saw was a tall, loosely built young man in the late twenties, thin, yet with good shoulders and long, smoothly powerful muscles. The face beneath the unruly mop of dark reddish-brown hair was not a handsome one, but there was something attractive about the clean-cut ruggedness of its lines. The dark gray eyes had a strange blending of the weary sophistication of a man who had seen too much, and the ever fresh curiosity of a street gamin who had never seen enough.

Amber Starr

Barnes' head felt as though a herd of Saturnian iron feet was stamping back and forth across his aching brain. The inside of his mouth tasted like one of Venus' blacker swamps looked. He scowled at his reflection.

"Brother, you sure look a lot better than I feel," he commented wryly. "However, there's nothing wrong that a revita-ray bath won't cure—I hope."

He crossed to the door of the adjoining room in the small suite. He opened the door, then stopped aghast at the blast of mingled heat, scent, and sound that caught him fairly in the face.

The heater of the room's temperature unit was turned up to the last possible notch. It had obviously been that way for hours, because the plates were so hot their surfaces smoked faintly.

Blissfully asleep upon the top of the heater, and snoring as only a Mercurian could snore, was the gnome-like little figure of Merky, Barnes' valet, errand boy, man-of-all-work, and devoted follower. His leathery hide sizzled upon the hot plates. There was an expression of blissful content upon his gnarled face.

BARNES plowed forward through the ovenlike air of the room, snapped off the heater, and turned the cooling system on full strength. He stood for a moment looking down at the slumbering gnome in amused exasperation.

There was an aroma drifting up from the sleeper's softly sizzling hide like that of a rubber overshoe being slowly fricasseed, but Barnes knew that no physical damage had been done. The leathery skin of a Mercurian was as nearly indestructible as any living tissue in the System. What would have been a blistering temperature to a Terrestrial or a Martian was to Merky merely a gentle warmth soothingly reminiscent of the sunward fringe of Mercury's Twilight Zone from which he came.

Barnes shook the gnome's shoulder.

"Merky!" he called. "Get off that grill, you undersized salamander!"

Merky reluctantly opened one eye. He stared indignantly at his employer and exploded into a brief flood of what sounded like Mercurian profanity. There was no way of knowing.

No other race in the System had ever been able to master, or even comprehend, the startling array of unbroken consonant sounds that made up the Mercurian tongue. To a Terrestrial ear the language sounded like an inebriate with a harelip trying to whistle through a mouthful of popcorn.

"Climb down off that griddle and get some clothes on!" Barnes said impatiently. "And lay out some duds for me. I've got work to do."

Merky disconsolately shrugged his knotted shoulders and obeyed.

"Is work blond or brunette?" he asked. "You got nice brown suit and red tie for brunette."

"There may be a blond in the picture," Barnes admitted, "but I hardly think she'll be important enough to rate any special costume effects."

"Never can tell," Merky said practically. "More better for blond you wear gray suit, blue tie."

Barnes crossed the room and flipped on the switch of the big telenews screen set in one wall. He passed over the various studs marked "Sports," "Comics," "Fashions," and "Industrial," and depressed the one labeled "Interplanetary News Flashes."

Printed text in inch-high letters began moving across the glowing screen, moving upward like a turning scroll. At the same time the smooth voice of an announcer read each item aloud. Both text and voice were broadcast from the telesheet's city room on distant Mars. Constant changes brought the newscast literally up to the minute.

Barnes turned the audio dial higher so that he could hear it in the bath. He stepped into the bath niche and turned on both water and revita-rays.

He had tuned in the telesheet almost at the beginning. The announcer gave the current date on the various planets, ranging from Thursday, May 14, 2250, on Earth, to Walgie, 710 Gryl 4-A, on Saturn, then plunged into the lead story:

"ANZOC, KAHLDOR, MARS.—Tomorrow afternoon at eighty units past fourteen, Standard Martian Time, two of the greatest twenty-twos in recent football history will meet in the Canal Bowl before a crowd that is expected to reach at least two hundred thousand. The prize at stake will be the forty-third Periodic Championship of the Solar System.

"The battle itself will be an epochal contest between two unbeaten giants. One team, Poly of Venus, features an attack so crushingly powerful that it

has literally ground all opponents into the dust. The other, Mars' own Aggies, has been marked by speed and deception that have sent it flashing through all rivals with the fiery havoc of a runaway comet."

THE announcer's voice went smoothly on, telling sidelights of the game. It was doubtful if Xarlon, Poly's great right quarterback, would recover from a sprained ankle in time to get into the fray. The Aggie's mastodonic Grydl, five hundred-pound All-System guard, was suffering from an attack of boils that might keep him on the bench.

Eighty-seven ticket scalpers had been arrested. Aggie supporters were charging that at least two of Poly's famed backs had been enrolled in open violation of the System Conference ban against proselyting.

Barnes grinned contentedly to himself as he basked in the soothing caress of warm water and revita-rays. Regardless of the job Gallard had summoned him for, he would at least get a chance to see the System's greatest sports event.

From football the broadcast went on to other Martian topics. Barnes listened idly at first, then with swiftly increasing tenseness. Kahldor and Lakla, the two greatest nations on Mars, had called their ambassadors home "for report." The border guard between the two countries had been tripled. Their armament factories were working on continuous shifts, and both countries were calling new classes for emergency military training.

Barnes shook his head in grim puzzlement. Things must have been happening upon Mars while he was in the Titanian jungles. There was something strangely and horribly wrong somewhere.

There were always jungle brawls and mountain feuds occurring upon the wild moons of Saturn and Jupiter, but those were merely battles fought by half-savage tribesmen with weapons as primitive as the fighters. Warfare among the civilized races of the System had not existed for the space of nearly two centuries.

War upon a civilized planet simply didn't make sense. And yet in the smoothly voiced fabric of the Martian news items the imminent threat of lethal conflict ran stark and clear, like a scarlet threat of blood—grim, foreboding, sinister!

CHAPTER II

Death in Space

IT WAS a relief when the announcer's topics finally shifted from Mars to scattered stories from elsewhere in the System. A freighter on the Venus-Saturn run had been caught in an uncharted etheric whirlpool just off the asteroid belt and was drifting with gravity plates disabled while rescue craft from Jupiter's Red Spot raced to her aid.

A bitter and bloody revolt had flared among the convicts at Mount Alcatraz, the System's dread penal colony located in the icy equatorial range of Neptune. There were two items from Earth, one of the election of Arden Matthews as President of United America, and the other of a severe earthquake in the nation of Balkania.

Then came a brief summary of the minor war on Titan, sent in by Barnes just before he boarded the *Empress of Mars.*

"RING CITY, SATURN, via STS, by Val X. Barnes," the announcer read, and Barnes grinned faintly in spite of himself.

He had never quite outgrown the kidlike satisfaction of hearing his name flashed through space. And anyway, there were few correspondents who rated the high honor of a by-line.

As the familiar item was read, Barnes relaxed in luxurious comfort. The warm water was soothing, and the revita-rays were removing the last traces of hangover from his system.

Then the announcer passed on to the next item, and Barnes' relaxed contentment ended abruptly. This

item, too, had a by-line, and the announcer read:

"REDOPOLIS, JUPITER, via CTS,
By Amber Starr

"The ancient demons again stalk hideously abroad among mortal men, not only upon Earth and Mars, where they first appeared, but here upon mighty Jupiter and its moons, and upon every other inhabited globe in the Solar System! No longer can the uncounted stories of demoniac appearances at a score of widely separated places during the past two years be set down to mere superstitious fantasy. Those stories are stark incredible truth.

"Rising in grisly resurrection from the dark ancient legends of scores of races upon a dozen worlds, the great Horned Ones again leer through malevolently slanted eyes at the puny works of Man. Again the cloven hoof has made its dread trail in the shadowed night of the System's slumbering worlds!

"This reporter has just finished a tour of every—"

The announcer's voice clicked abruptly to silence and the glowing screen went blank as Barnes charged precipitately out of the bath and snapped off the switch. The expression on his face was like that of a diner who has suddenly bitten into a malodorous egg.

"Demons!" he exploded. "Horned Ones! Fooey! And for girl reporters, more fooey! An entire Solar System full of legitimate news items and that dumb dame pokes around on dark nights looking for cow-footed bogy men with long tails!"

Still, he reflected uneasily, Amber Starr was here on the *Empress of Mars*. And the young woman, dumb or otherwise, might be lucky enough to have that story Gallard had mentioned explode right in her lap.

BARNES hastily dressed and headed for the salon. If anything was going to happen on the *Empress of Mars*, the salon was as logical a place as any to expect it. And if nothing happened—well, refreshments still were served in the salon.

He arrived there after a short walk through softly lighted, deeply carpeted corridors, and stopped for a moment just inside the doors, looking the place over. Indirect lighting bathed the huge salon in a flood of shimmering opalescence, soothing yet sensuous. The walls were covered with alternating murals of vivid Martian art and softly blended Venusian water pastels. The arched ceiling was a marvelous specimen of nacreous Saturnian polychrome.

Seated at small tables around the central dancing space was a cosmopolitan crowd hailing from every globe in the System—pale-haired, delicately featured Venusians; crisply handsome Martians, black-haired and faintly copper of complexion; the widely variegated races of Earth, white, yellow, black, and brown; slender, fragile-boned, blue-skinned natives of Ganymede; ponderous, bulging-muscled products of mighty Jupiter.

Every stimulant and intoxicant in the System was in the crystallite glasses on the tables, from the mild, whitish *pulquo* of Venus to the dark purple, explosively powerful *mabonex* of Jupiter.

Ars Kader, famed Martian maestro of the spaceways, led his orchestra in arrangements cunningly contrived to include rhythm and tempo to appeal to all worlds alike. Barnes idly noted that since he had seen Kader on his last trip aboard the *Empress of Mars* six months ago the slender, intense young orchestra leader had started wearing glasses.

The scene looked normal enough, a typical salon on a luxury spaceliner—but there was something wrong. Barnes' perception of danger had been sharpened by too many years of perilous living to be fooled. There was something in the air of the big room as subtly menacing as the dead quiet before one of Venus' cataclysmic electric hurricanes.

By far the greater part of the crowd was probably en route to the

Canal Bowl game at Anzoc. It should have been a gay crowd, but it wasn't. There was a sullen tenseness everywhere, and the few who were gay were too hysterical about it. The scattered bits of conversation that Barnes heard were not of football, but of war.

Barnes headed for the long bar that ran along the opposite wall. As he threaded his way among the tables, he tried to pick out Amber Starr.

There were only two yellow-haired Terrestrials who might fill the bill, he decided. One was a tall, languorous blond, exotically beautiful in spite of the fact that her long, carmined nails were clipped in exaggerated barbed points and her make-up included the green lipstick and blue cheekbone shadow currently popular among Earth's extremer set. The other was a prim, mousy little person whose light blue eyes were curiously intense behind large-lensed glasses, and who wore no make-up at all upon her rather angular features.

BETTER keep a weather eye on those two, Barnes decided. Then he arrived at the bar and promptly forgot both of them. There was another girl sitting on one of the stools, sipping ardenade and nibbling at salted gando nuts. The rear view of the slender, smartly dressed little figure was undeniably pleasing.

Barnes slipped into the vacant stool at her right and ordered a glass of

The strange man's body stiffened as inconceivable power tore through it (Chapter XIII)

pulquo. The mild, fragrant stimulant could also serve for breakfast.

He stole a glance into the bar mirror. The front view of his neighbor was all that the back had promised —and much more.

The softly oval face under the chic, tight fitting hat had a piquant beauty suggesting a slightly malicious angel. There was no freakish make-up to mar the faint golden tan of the perfect complexion. The faintly tinted nails on the slim, strong little hands were trimmed in the almond symmetry with which human nails should be shaped.

"Very, very nice," Barnes murmured contentedly to himself.

The small bowl of gando nuts at the girl's elbow would make an excellent ice-breaker. Barnes picked up his drink, turned his head the other way, and with studied carelessness sent his left elbow sweeping toward the nut bowl.

It met nothing but thin air. Barnes turned and looked to see what was wrong.

The nut bowl had been moved out of reach. The girl's eyes met his own, with cool amusement in their dark blue depths.

"Let's just skip the spilled bowl routine," she suggested sweetly. "It's a little juvenile anyway, don't you think?"

Barnes' lower jaw dropped dumbly down in spite of himself.

"And while we're at it," the girl continued, her voice as sweetly patient as though she were talking to a small and somewhat backward child, "let's also skip the other items. I'm not the girl you met in the Venusian Eden Gardens, or anywhere else. I do not know Joe Doakes of Chicago, nor do I know Al McGoon of Saturn City. That gets about all those bothersome little preliminaries out of the way, doesn't it?" She shook her head pensively. "I'm disappointed. I'd really expected a little more subtle pick-up job from the famous Val X. Barnes."

Barnes' gaze went still blanker. "I don't happen to have my name painted on my forehead like an Ionian hill rajah, do I?" he demanded.

The girl's eyes widened in mock surprise. "Why, I thought every news-hawk in the System was supposed to know the great Val X. Barnes!"

Barnes saw for the first time the tip of a pale golden curl peeping out from under the edge of the tight little hat. His jaw clicked grimly shut.

"I get it," he said flatly. "I'm a little slow, but I always catch on eventually. I have the honor of being with the famous, the one and only Miss Amber Starr."

ANGER edged Barnes' voice as he went on. He had been made to feel like a particularly inept fool, and it was an experience for which Mr. Barnes did not greatly care.

"Amber Starr," he said, "Cosmic's glamorous 'Golden Gal' of the great spaceways. Also known as the 'Blond Bombshell.' Known to others as the 'Golden Cyclone.' And known to still others, including most of the hard-working male reporters in whose way she forever gets, as the 'Taffy Headed Nuisance' and 'Li'l Yellow Poison.'"

Ice congealed in the clear blue depths of the famed Starr eyes.

"Since we seem to have drifted into personalities, Mr. Barnes," she purred, "I might mention that I have heard rumors about the true meaning of that letter with which you part your name in the middle. I believe some of your not so loving competitors have claimed that the 'X' is short for 'Doublecross.' I have also heard certain rumors that, if it meant a scoop, you would cheerfully cut your own grandmother's throat."

"I have no grandma," Barnes said politely. "And my working ethics, if any, are my own business. I at least do not try to get by upon the lucky accident of possessing cute blue eyes and a nice pair of legs."

"I gather that you do not care for girl reporters, Mr. Barnes?"

"You gather quite correctly, Miss Starr. There is only one possible telesheet spot where a female newsgath-

erer can be of the slightest legitimate value—and that is the Woman's Page. Gals are ideally fitted to compose thrilling recipes for Venusian seven-layer diddleberry pudding. They can tell deluded customers various gooey messes that properly applied will make bad complexions worse. They can even give appropriately idiotic advice to love-smitten morons. But as genuine working reporters? In one word, Miss Starr—fooey!"

The ice in the Starr eyes melted beneath a wave of volcanic heat. Lightning flashed in the blue depths. Barnes braced himself for the coming storm.

It never came. Instead, their attention was abruptly drawn to the big room behind them. With startling suddenness the babble of voices in the salon had died into a strange, tense silence. They whirled upon their stools.

Ars Kader had left the orchestra platform and come down upon the floor. His musicians still played, but with an oddly faltering uncertainty. Most of them looked merely worried as their eyes followed their leader's progress across the floor. But one of them, the kohl-gong drummer, was a white-faced picture of stark terror.

As Kader made his way among the tables he indulged in none of his usual easy greetings to friends. He walked like a man in a trance. His face was a pale, set mask. His gaze was apparently fixed upon a table near the corner.

Nesk Balon, beefy, red-faced minister in the Laklan High Council, sat at that table. He was resplendent in the full military dress of his office, and surrounded by his inevitable coterie of sleekly beautiful ladies of pleasure.

KADER came to a halt beside the the table. He peered down through his thick-lensed glasses at the delicately spiced plate of landro pheasant in front of Balon.

"You eat landro?" Kader said. There was infinite contempt in his low, bitter voice. "But no! Landro is for men."

With a sudden premonitory chill Barnes remembered that the slender orchestra leader was a native of Kahldor, and famous for his fanatical devotion to his homeland.

Kader's voice rose through the tautly hushed room as he called to a nearby waiter.

"Waiter," he said preemptorily, "bring for this Laklan swine a heaping platter of karlu nuts!"

There was no greater insult possible to a native of the Red Planet. The singularly unfragrant karlu nut was fed only to the lowest Martian domestic animals.

Nesk Balon lurched to his feet with a bellow of outraged fury. He pawed clumsily for the heavy pistol in a holster at his hip. He never drew it.

Kader's right hand flashed with lightning speed beneath his dark-red dress coat. He snatched a pistol from a shoulder holster, and fired. The faint *ping* of the gun was drowned in the muffled crash of a penetro-detonite bullet bursting deep in Nesk Balon's burly body.

Balon swayed, with half his chest blown out by the deadly pellet. He tried to clamp restraining fingers over the horribly gaping cavity, then went crashing to the floor.

The gun dropped from Ars Kader's fingers. His left hand flashed to his mouth. It apparently bore poison whose action was both deadly and swift. In a scant five seconds the orchestra leader slumped, twitching to the floor beside the body of his victim.

CHAPTER III

Yellow Poison

BARNES hurried across the floor and forced his way through the shocked spectators who swiftly thronged in a circle about the two huddled bodies. He was vaguely aware that Amber Starr's trim little figure was following promptly in his wake.

Nesk Balon was already dead, but Ars Kader was still breathing. Recog-

nition seemed to come briefly to the half-closed eyes behind the orchestra leader's glasses as he saw Barnes. The set gray lips moved feebly, but the words were too faint to be distinguished.

Barnes dropped on his knees beside Kader.

"Not me, Barnes—not me!" The labored whisper was so faint that Barnes had to put his ear within inches of the dying man's lips. "It was the Brain Sp—"

The faint whisper died away completely before the last word could be finished. An instant later, a strange and infinitely dreadful thing happened to Ars Kader.

His eyes became milkily opaque, then seemed to melt. The grisly phenomenon spread upward with lightning speed. His forehead and the entire top of his skull literally *dissolved.* There was a brief moment of faintly steaming vapor of a peculiar acid pungence, then stillness and death.

Barnes looked up into the horror-stricken faces of the spectators above him. Amber Starr, a bit pale around the lips, but with eyes coolly alert, was standing there beside a tall young Venusian who wore the uniform of a ship's under-officer.

"What did he say to you?" the officer asked.

Barnes' brain raced with devious swiftness as he rose to his feet. He nodded gravely toward Amber Starr.

"Kader said that yellow-haired girl there was behind the killing," he said, his voice crisply authoritative. "Hold her for me while I contact Martian Bureau Headquarters."

"Why, you unmitigated, double-crossing liar!" Amber exploded.

For once, the famed composure of Cosmic's Golden Girl was shattered beyond repair. She turned furiously to the young officer.

"I'm no murderess!" she blazed. "I'm a reporter! That flannel-mouthed, double-talking impostor has no official authority. Ask him for his credentials."

The officer, red-faced and uncertain, looked questioningly at Barnes. Barnes brought a hand out of his coat pocket and opened it to show a glimpse of a shield-shaped bit of yellow metal. It happened to be a Titanian press-badge, but the shape and color were reasonably similar to the famed insignia of the Interplanetary Patrol.

"Barnes is the name," he said curtly, "and there's my authority."

"All right, Mr. Barnes," the officer said unhappily. "Go ahead and report. I'll hold her for you."

Barnes turned his back upon the frantically protesting Miss Starr, made his way through the crowd, and headed for the visiphone room that opened off the salon. The place was deserted. He settled himself in an armchair in front of one of the instruments and dialed the *Empress of Mars'* operator.

"Give me Mr. Gilbert Gallard at the Stellar Syndicate Bureau in Anzoc, Mars, sweetheart," he said, "and reverse the tolls."

THERE was a moment of futile clicking, then,

"I am sorry, sir, all of the Stellar lines are busy."

"Keep buzzing 'em. I'll wait."

Barnes sank back in the chair and fumbled for a cigarette. As he was lighting it he heard a faint, almost imperceptible sound behind him. He whirled around quickly, but not quickly enough.

He had one split second glimpse of a small blonde with stormy blue eyes, and a tiny somno-gas pistol gleaming in a slender hand. Then the pistol coughed and the compact little cloud of milky vapor caught him full in the face.

He dimly felt himself falling from the chair. From what seemed an enormous distance he heard a cool voice saying mockingly:

"Gangway, Mr. Barnes. Time for the Woman's Page to go to press!"

Then Barnes plunged headlong into the dark and dreamless oblivion of somno. . . .

He returned to consciousness on the bed back in his own suite with Merky fussing over him. Barnes got to his feet.

"What happened?" he demanded.

"You got blonded," Merky said succinctly.

"I know that," Barnes retorted. "But how did that taffy-headed menace get away from that under-officer so quick?"

"Captain came salon just then. Girl know captain long time, captain know girl."

"How long have I been bye-bye?"

"Three Terrestrial hour—maybe four."

Barnes whistled. "She certainly gave me the full cylinder!"

He glanced over at the visiphone. It was disconnected.

"Gallard buzz every two minute," Merky explained. "Say please you call him quick so he can personally fire."

Barnes shrugged indifferent shoulders. "If I had an Earth dollar for every time that frog-faced slave-driver has fired me, I'd have enough to buy an asteroid. I'll wait till we land and take it in person. Maybe he'll cool off a little by then."

"You also are arrest for impersonate officer."

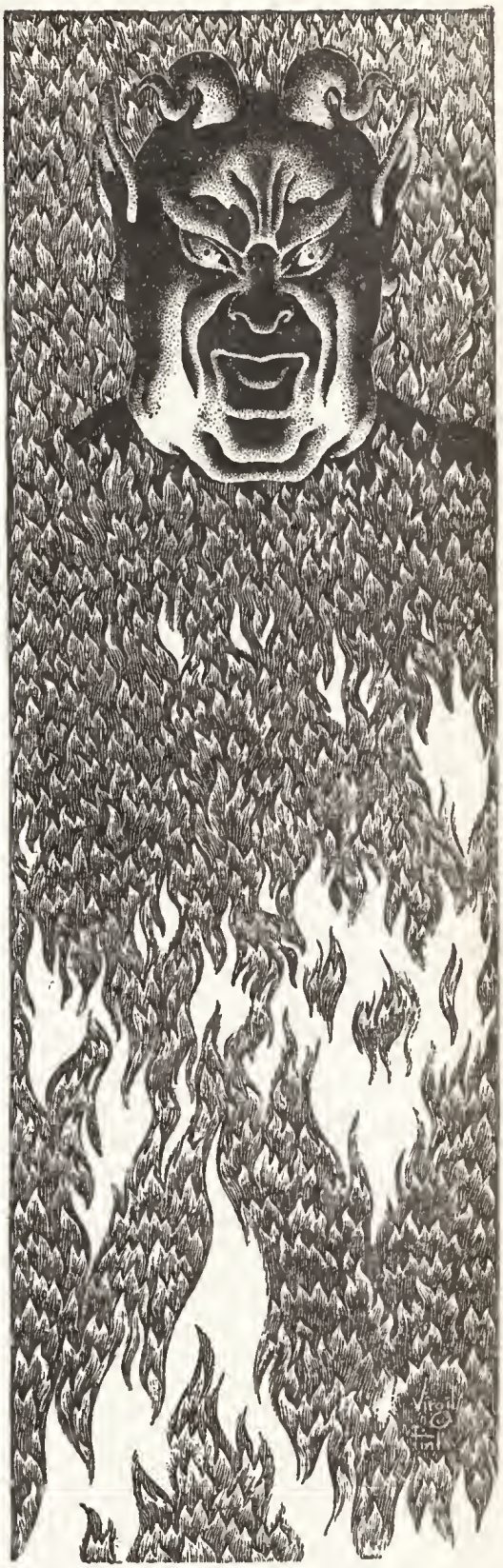
"Nuts! I didn't impersonate anyone. I merely flashed a press badge and a sappy subaltern jumped at conclusions. I can talk my way out of that, all right."

He did, but it took some time. When he finally left the captain's quarters the *Empress of Mars* was just being wheeled into her berth in the great sprawling station at Anzoc. He had a distant view of Amber Starr disembarking. She was accompanied by an enormous Jovian woman who seemed to be a personal maid.

"Plenty big female bodyguard," Merky commented.

"Yeah," Barnes agreed dourly. "Stick a couple of landing ports on that Jovian behemoth and she'd pass for a freighter. But she isn't big enough to save Little Goldilocks from what she has coming. I've got a score to settle with that small portion of yellow-headed poison!"

Barnes' gaze ranged on beyond the two women to where several members of the late Ars Kader's orchestra were



An evil, reptilian voice came from the creature in the red mist (Chapter XVI)

disembarking. One of them was the kohl-gong drummer. Barnes' eyes narrowed.

"Follow that gong beater, Merky," he ordered. "Don't leave him till he definitely holes up somewhere, then buzz me at Stellar."

THE little Mercurian scuttled away through the crowd. Barnes followed more leisurely. He stepped out of the big station into the clear sunshine of a late Martian afternoon. To eyes fresh from Earth the light would have seemed strangely pale, but after six months on distant Titan the sun seemed almost dazzlingly bright to Barnes.

Anzoc, capital of Khaldor, was large for a Martian city, with nearly half a million inhabitants from every part of the Solar System drawn there by its perfect year-round climate. It was located near enough the equator to have consistently warm days, and the great red desert that ringed it on three sides brought nights that were crisply dry and invigoratingly cool. Rain was practically unknown, but the giant canal that ran through the city made an eternally fertile oasis of the place.

It was a city of wide, sweeping streets with surfaces of lustrous black ladrox, and lined with buildings whose elaborately ornamented facades were gaudy with the startling array of rainbow colors so dear to the Martian heart. The overwhelming majority of the structures were low and sprawling. Martians had never acquired the Terrestrial passion for building vertically. The bulk of the six-story Stellar Syndicate building two blocks from the station towered above its neighbors like a skyscraper.

Barnes passed along a wide pavement whose normal throngs were increased still more by the influx of spectators there for the morrow's great sports classic. The tall light standards were gay with the rival colors of the two teams, and shop windows were plastered with placards depicting the famed Blue Thunderbird emblem of Poly, and the equally noted Crimson Sandbear of the Aggies.

It was a holiday crowd, and yet to Barnes it seemed there was present that same intangible undercurrent of tension and menace he had noted on the spaceliner. There were more uniformed soldiers on the street than he had ever seen there before, and they had none of the careless gaiety usual to Khaldorian soldiery. These men were grave-faced and coldly alert.

At the end of the first block a small crowd was gathered around a street corner orator. Barnes stopped on the outskirts to listen for a moment.

The speaker was a Martian desert hermit, tall, hairy, and blazing-eyed. He wore a particularly filthy specimen of the long scarlet Mother Hubbard affected by most recluses of the great sandy wastes.

"I tell you, my friends, there is blood on the Sun!" the hermit croaked hoarsely, gesturing toward the orb with a markedly unwashed hand. "Blood on the Sun, blood that means war, death, and destruction, not only for Mars, but for all the worlds of the System! Ancient Evil has again arisen! The Scaled Ones walk in the night. The Cloven Hoof has appeared in the sinful paths of all the worlds. The Great Horned god has returned. Soon he will claim his own. If ye would escape that dread time of doom, ye babbling children of sin, repent before it is too late. Repent, and wash away the blood that bathes the Sun!"

AN EXCITABLE little Ionian, with puckered face worriedly awry, nudged Barnes' arm.

"Mebbe he's got somethin' there, eh brother?" he chattered nervously. "Whadda you think, huh?"

Barnes grinned. "I think the guy is merely a horrible example of what happens to people who read too many of the dear little Golden Girl's bogy man stories."

He turned his back upon the gaping Ionian and went on down the block to the Stellar Building. A moment later he was ushered into Gallard's office on the sixth floor.

Gil Gallard raised his froglike face, took one good look at his star employee, and started talking. Barnes listened in silent awe for five minutes,

then raised a restraining hand.

"It was beautiful, Gil, positively beautiful," he said admiringly, "but you've reached the place where you're beginning to repeat yourself. That's the second time you've used the phrase about 'a rum-guzzling ring-nosed Saturnian baboon with the brain capacity of an undernourished peanut.'"

Gallard's face purpled apoplectically.

"Let's just skip the other seven pages," Barnes said soothingly. "I'll admit I was scooped. The taffy-headed gal made a sap of me. I made the grave mistake of underating the little pestilence. It won't happen again. So let's take it up from there. What was it you called me in to Mars for?"

Gallard's irascible expression gave way to something deeper and graver. He rose and went over to the window.

"Take a look over there," he said.

Barnes followed the direction of Gallard's pointing finger. Far to the north of the city a great silvery cylinder floated high in the ash-blue Martian sky. Beneath it a gnatlike swarm of black specks danced in intricate maneuvers.

"Looks like a mamma boat and a bunch of robot planes is all," Barnes said wonderingly. "What's so strange about that?"

"Those are warplanes," Gallard said soberly. "The largest fleet of warplanes that Kahldor has had in the past hundred years. A month from now there will be five times that many. Kahldorian armament factories are working day and night. So are those of Lakla. And so are those of Rildon, of Barxi, and of every other nation on Mars."

Barnes shook his head. "I don't get it. Civilized nations simply don't go to war any more. With the terrific destructive potentialities of modern science, they don't dare. There hasn't been a major conflict since the one that nearly wrecked Earth's civilization away back in the Twentieth Century."

Gallard's eyes were somber behind his glasses.

"Unless things change for the better rapidly, Val, there will be war here in a matter of weeks. It won't be just a few nations. It will be the entire planet of Mars—and it may even bring in other worlds."

"But why?" Barnes asked. "What possible reason could there be for such incredibly criminal folly? Who would benefit?"

"Finding the answer to those questions, Val, is the task I brought you here for." Gallard returned to his desk. "Sit down. I'll sketch the layout for you briefly."

WHEN Barnes sat down, Gallard began portentously:

"This situation didn't develop overnight. It started about a year ago with what has since become known as the Gorlu incident. A minor officer in charge of the Kahldorian customs guard at Gorlu made an idiotic blunder one night and ordered his squad to fire upon a party of Laklan picnickers. Seven Laklans were killed. The officer vanished—probably went into the desert and killed himself—and the affair seemed ended. The next incident occurred when a Laklan artillery unit dropped a detonite shell in a Khaldorian border village. Lakla claimed it must have been an accident. The officer in charge of that unit also disappeared.

Since then it's been one long succession of provocative incidents. A few of them could be traced to the apparently insane acts of individuals in authority. In those cases the offenders have either fled or committed suicide. But the great bulk of them have been things where no definite blame could be placed — consular buildings being stoned by hysterical mobs, officials making inflammatory speeches at the worst possible moments, military orders being tragically misunderstood."

Barnes shook his head. "I'd no idea the situation was so bad," he said. "We didn't hear much about it back in the Titan jungle country. I suppose Ars Kader's utterly senseless murder of Nesk Balon was the latest episode."

Gallard nodded. "The latest, and

one of the worst. Balon was one of Lakla's popular idols. I tell you, Val, just about one more major incident will mean the works. Khaldor and Lakla have every other country on Mars lined up in mutual aid pacts. When the blow-up comes it will mean the entire planet—and may involve every civilized globe in the Solar System. There have been local incidents here in recent weeks that created plenty of bad feeling between Martians and visitors from both Venus and Earth."

"Nice picture you paint!" Barnes said soberly. "Any leads of any kind as to who, or what, might be behind this gigantic campaign of war mongering?"

Gallard shrugged. "Nothing worth anything. Every time you try to investigate you run into something too completely screwy to make sense. For instance, two weeks ago they jailed a gang of Khaldorian stevedores who beat up a party of Terrestrial tourists without any apparent reason. The leader of the stevies said they were hired to do it by some mysterious stranger whose eyes shone in the dark like the eyes of a cat!"

"That's a lead," Barnes said, "that would baffle even the demon-hunting Miss Starr. It's almost as haywire as the dying message Ars Kader whispered to me."

"What was that?" Gallard said quickly. "Starr didn't have anything about it in her story."

"She didn't hear it," Barnes answered. "Neither did anyone else. I'm not even sure I got it straight. It sounded like 'Not me, Val—it was the Brain Sp—'. Ars died then, before he could even finish the last word. I'll break a story on it as soon as I get something half-way intelligent to go with it."

THE desk visiphone buzzed sharply. Gallard answered it, then turned the screen toward Barnes.

"For you, Val," he said. "It's that little Mercurian stove-sleeper of yours."

"Hi, Boss," Merky greeted. "Kohl gong beater hole up here at Water Garden Café, Canal Street and Desert Avenue. Is now try drink place dry. Look like he maybe can do if he no bust."

"I'll be right over," Barnes snapped. "Keep an eye on him till I get there."

"Will do," Merky acknowledged, and broke the connection.

"That's the gong drummer in Kader's band," Barnes explained briefly. "I'll call you back if I get anything out of him. I've got a hunch he might have a really hot lead. He was the one guy in the *Empress of Mars* salon who seemed to know what was going to happen when Kader started for Balon. He not only knew, but he was scared white with knowing it!"

CHAPTER IV

Eyes of Green Fire

DESCENDING to the street, Barnes hailed a two-wheeled taxi. The driver retracted the vehicle's small parking wheels and went spinning away with the utter abandon peculiar to hilarious Terrestrials and sober Martians.

A short dash across the city brought them to where the Water Garden Café rested on a bank overlooking the sunset-reddened waters of the Great Canal. Merky was waiting in the shadows of a doorway across the street.

"Why the long range observation post?" Barnes asked curiously. "First time I ever knew you were allergic to bars."

"Was in bar," Merky answered. "Could no stay. Might be recognize."

"Nuts. That drummer wouldn't know you from the Poojah of Saturn."

"Yellow-head girl would."

"What?" Barnes yelped. "Is that blond pestilence here?"

Merky nodded. "She arrive just after I call you. She with drummer in booth now. Think she siren him."

"Uh-oh! Barnes to the rescue. Stick around out here, Merky. If that female Jovian battleship comes over the horizon, let me know."

Val tried to shield Amber from the impact of the deadly globules (Chapter IX)

Barnes entered the café. It was quiet, softly lighted, and looked like a nice respectable neighborhood place. Solid middle-class Martians sat in the wall booths, sipping mild beverages with staid decorum.

Over in a far corner a pale, dreamy-eyed Venusian girl played languorous melodies on an electrichord. Behind a small bar just inside the door was a totally bald, effusively smiling little Martian who seemed to be the proprietor.

Malice danced deep within Barnes' eyes as he sized the situation up. He stepped over to the blandly smiling little man behind the bar.

"Where is my wife?" he demanded in a hoarse whisper.

The proprietor spread apologetic hands. "But I do not know your wife!"

"She's here, all right," Barnes said confidently. "She's a small blond girl, and she's probably with a tousel-haired, red-faced young fellow about my size."

"Oh, those two," the Martian said uneasily. "They are back in that second booth from the rear."

"Well, she's going home with me right now!" Barnes said flatly. "She'll raise one high rumpus about it. She always does. But don't worry, brother. I'll get her out all right. And I'll pay for anything she breaks on the way out."

"But no, no!" the little Martian moaned. "There can be no such disturbance here. This is a quiet, re-

spectable place. My patrons would not like it!"

"Sorry, brother, but my wife is just naturally nine-tenths wildcat when she is being forcibly removed from some place. The only way to get her out quietly would be to render her unconscious, and I am certainly not going to bop my little girl on the head just because some of your customers do not like noise!"

"Wait a minute!" the Martian begged. "Let me give to her a Michael O'Fynn in her next drink. Then you can remove her quietly."

BARNES scowled momentarily as though pondering the suggestion, then nodded agreement.

"Might be better, at that. All right, go ahead."

"And you will leave quietly, without fighting with the red-faced young man?"

"Word of honor. You slip my little darling the O'Fynn and I'll carry her out of here peaceful as a Venusian cuddle-lamb."

Barnes went back to the rear booth. The drummer was sitting there with an empty brandeur glass in front of him. He seemed in a half stupor. His face was heavily flushed. His eyes stared dazedly straight ahead.

Amber Starr sat close beside the drummer, turning the full power of one of the best looking faces in the System squarely upon him. She did not seem to be doing so well. All the response she was getting was a dreary mumble.

"Greetings, kiddies," Barnes said cheerfully, sliding into the booth beside them.

"Oh, it's you," Amber said coldly. The expression on her face suggested that she was looking at something that had been dragged in by a singularly unparticular cat.

"You might introduce me to our friend here," Barnes suggested.

"His name is Johnny Murray," Amber said ungraciously. "He's a nice boy and he comes from my home state of Calizona. Johnny, this is Mr. Barnes. Just ignore him, and then maybe he'll just simply crawl back under his board."

There was no recognition in Murray's bleared eyes.

"It was awful, I tell you—awful!" he mumbled. "My old pal Ars!"

Barnes' eyes narrowed. "You may be an expert in gathering info via the good old glamour technique, Miss Starr," he said, "but I'm afraid you don't know the finer points of certain liquors. About one more shot of that dopey brandeur in Johnny here and neither of us will get anything out of him. He needs a good strong jolt of Jovian joy-juice. That'll shock him into being rational for a few minutes anyway."

"Not being a bar-fly," Amber said icily, "I wouldn't know."

Barnes summoned the bald little proprietor.

"Give Mr. Murray here a double *mabonex*," he ordered. "For me a straight bourbon." He turned to Amber. "And what will you have, darling?"

"A small ardenade, please."

When the Martian had gone, Amber turned a hostile face to Barnes.

"Why the sudden term of endearment, Mr. Barnes?" she demanded flatly.

Barnes grinned. "Just my better nature finally breaking through. I'm fond of all small cuddly things with blue eyes, even if they do sometimes have claws. But, putting personalities aside, how did you find Johnny so quickly?"

"Before we left the *Empress of Mars* I made a date to meet him here. I knew he was Ars Kader's best friend."

THE Martian brought the drinks. For a moment Barnes was afraid that Amber was going to leave her glass untouched. Then she lifted it and drained the sweet milky liquid.

Barnes relaxed and waited for the inevitable. It was not long in coming. The Michael O'Fynn was designed to dispose of unruly customers with a maximum of speed and a minimum of bother. It acted in a matter of seconds.

Alarm flashed into Amber's face as

she felt the telltale numbness surge over her body. She tried to speak, but her jaw muscles went dead before the first word could come out. Barnes placed a finger under her small, rounded chin and gently closed her mouth.

"Bye-bye time for the Woman's Page," he said chidingly. "An eye for an eye, and a sleep for a sleep. That's the Barnes motto. Nightie night, Golden Girl."

Anger blazed ever so briefly in the stormy blue eyes. Then Amber's drowsy lids closed, and she slept. Barnes propped her carefully in a corner of the seat and turned to Murray.

The strong Jovian liquor had already registered upon the drummer. His mumbling lethargy was gone. He stared at Barnes with eyes that were feverishly alive. Barnes took the direct attack.

"Why did Ars Kader kill Nesk Balon, Johnny?" he demanded.

"I don't know!" Murray moaned. "But Ars was crazy! He wasn't himself. He was something different and horrible. He was. . . . But what's the use? You wouldn't believe me!"

"I'll believe you, Johnny," Barnes said soothingly.

"All right, I'll tell you. Ars and I were pals. I knew him like a brother. It was about six weeks ago he changed. When we docked in Anzoc between trips he was away two days. When he came back he was wearing glasses —and he wasn't Ars! He was like something scaly, and evil, and different. And his eyes! I woke him up once and in the dark they shone like coals of fire. They didn't shine that way when he put his glasses on."

"How did you know he was going to kill Balon? You were deathly scared when he started across the floor."

"I didn't know what he was going to do. But I knew he'd kill somebody sooner or later. You didn't see those eyes, fellah. You don't know the awful thing Ars had become!"

Murray broke down then, burying his head in his arms and sobbing incoherent phrases to himself. Barnes tried briefly to snap him out of it, then gave it up.

He gathered Amber's slumbering figure up in his arms. Striding past booths of quietly scandalized patrons, and a relieved little Martian proprietor, he went on out to the street. Merky came across to meet him.

Barnes placed Amber in one of the two taxis in the stand in front of the café. As he tucked her in the seat corner she looked so much like a small, tired, and lovely child that he almost felt ashamed of himself.

"Take her home, Merky," he ordered. "You can call Cosmic and find out where she's staying. Then go to the Palais Hotel and get rooms for us."

"Will do."

"And, Merky, if I find you sleeping on top of the heater when I come in I'll lock you up in the ice-box for the night. Now scram. I've got a jail to visit."

HE TOOK the second cab and headed for the spot where the district jail was located in the desert a mile from the city limits. It was far past visiting hours when he got there, but the warden had not forgotten the warm support the Stellar Syndicate had given him in the recent election. He promptly brought in the prisoner Barnes wished to see. It was the leader of the Martian stevedores who had been recently jailed for the assault upon a party of tourists.

"I know most of your story," Barnes said bluntly. "You and your gang were plastered, and some mysterious stranger hired you to beat up a party of innocent Terrestrial tourists. What I want is a description of the guy who hired you."

The stevedore shrugged burly shoulders. "All I know, doc," he said sullenly, "is that the guy wore glasses, and they musta had mighty peculiar glass in 'em. Because without 'em his eyes shone like the lamps of a jungle cat."

"How do you know they did?"

"Because I seen 'em. Listen, doc. We was waitin' in a dark alley for them Terries. I just happened to bump hard against this guy and knocked his glasses off. Before he

could get 'em on again I got a good look at his eyes, and doc, I swear to you they was pure green fire!"

"Was he a Martian?"

"He talked like one. I couldn't see his face. He had a scarf around most of it. He mighta been a Terrie. I'm sure he wasn't a Venie. He was too hefty."

"All right," Barnes said, "that's all. Thanks a lot, warden."

He called Stellar from a visiphone booth in the hall, and got Gallard.

"Hello, Gil," he said. "I'm over here at the district jail."

"Oh, lord!" Gallard sighed resignedly. "All right, how much bail do I have to put up this time?"

Barnes grinned. "Surprise! My call here was purely in the line of duty. That gong drummer gave me a lead that tied right in with the cat-eye story the Martian stevedore told at his trial."

"If you got anything, let's have it."

"I got plenty, but if we break it now we'll muff our chance to get a whole lot more. We've got to pick up some more loose pieces yet. Then we'll have a yarn that will make history!"

"Modest sort of a youth, aren't you?"

"It's my one weakness. All kidding aside, Gil, here's what I want you to do for me. Find out how many of the main offenders in those provocative incidents wore glasses."

"Wore glasses?"

"Um-hm. And particularly find out if they just started wearing cheaters a short time before they went haywire. Also, how many of them were single, divorced, or otherwise living alone. And if they did wear glasses get hold of at least one pair if you have to pay a thousand Terrestrial bucks for them!"

GALLARD'S froglike face went blank, then openly suspicious.

"How many bars have you been in tonight, anyway?" he demanded.

"One bar, and had one drink."

"It must have been pure absinthe, liberaly laced with hasheesh. Still, you look reasonably sober. I'll start the boys digging out what you want. As for you, I suppose it is too much to expect to see you before noon tomorrow, but you'd better get here shortly after, because you have a job to do."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning that you are scheduled to spend the afternoon occupying a seat on the hundred-yard line at the Canal Bowl."

"It will be a pleasure! But why the sudden generosity?"

"It isn't. It's purely business. A certain mysterious somebody who has given us most of our tips about provocative incidents in the past just called in a while ago. If what he said is right—and the guy has never been wrong yet—something is going to happen in the Canal Bowl tomorrow that will be the granddaddy of all inflammatory incidents!"

CHAPTER V

Death in the Night

WHEN Barnes stepped out of the soundproof visiphone booth he started down the hall toward the main gate, then suddenly stopped. From somewhere in the prison behind him there were unmistakable sounds of turmoil.

A siren wailed, then died fretfully into silence. There was the staccato tread of feet hurrying through unseen corridors, and the blurred jumble of excited voices. Barnes raced along the hall toward the scene of the disturbance.

The passageway angled sharply twice. He rounded the second turn and found a tragic tableau spread vividly before him in a flood of glareless white light from a neonsten unit overhead.

The body of a man was sprawled limply on the floor. Ribbons of dark liquid streamed from his shattered skull over the light grey surface of the stone paving. The warden was kneeling beside the body. Three uniformed men huddled close around.

One was the guard who had brought the stevedore into the office for Barnes' interview. His face had been as ruddy as a ripe tomato then, but now it was palely mottled and shaken.

The warden rose to his feet as Barnes reached the group.

"Nothing we can do for him," the official said gravely. "Poor fellow's as dead as a skewered ghexo boar. That malzite bar plugged him clear to the waist!"

The body on the floor was that of the stevedore convict. The man had been literally impaled lengthwise by a two-inch-thick steel bar that had struck him from directly overhead. A foot and a half of the bar still protruded from the top of his shattered skull. The rest of it had driven halfway down through the length of his body.

"What happened, Warden?" Barnes asked.

"Malzite bar fell from the rack up there," the warden answered tersely. "Rack's been worn out for months. Expected something like this to happen long ago, but the board was too tight to give us money for a new one."

"It came shooting down just as we passed under it!" the guard chattered through white lips. "No warning, no nothing. Half a second later, and it'd been me that got it instead of him!"

Barnes looked up to where a long row of similar bars were cradled in a vertical wall-rack ten feet above the corridor floor. The bars, used by convict labor in working the big crystal blocks of the nearby malzite deposits, had both ends tapered to wicked points. Just above the rack was a narrow walk fronting a tier of second-story rooms.

"Someone could have been hidden up there to do a personal job of aiming on that bar," Barnes said, half to himself. "And that same someone would have had plenty of chance to get away in the confusion."

"You're letting your headline craving run away with you, Barnes," the warden said sourly. "This poor devil was a harmless good-natured lug who didn't have an enemy in the prison. It couldn't have been anything but an accident."

"Maybe it was an accident," Barnes said wryly. "And maybe there's another accident just like it going to happen to somebody else if I don't get there first. So long, Warden."

BARNES hurried back through the corridor out the main gate and to his waiting taxi. He fished a gleaming green ten-pax coin out of his pocket and showed it to the driver.

"Get me back to the Water Garden Café in fourteen units or less, and you get this," he said tersely.

The driver needed no further encouragement. They took off with an acceleration suggesting a badly scared comet. After their swooping arc around the first curve Barnes shut his eyes and desperately hoped for the best. They finally came to a halt with a brake-screaming abruptness that piled Barnes in a heap on the floor.

"Eleven and one-half units," the driver announced with vast satisfaction.

Barnes clambered shakily out and

[*Turn page*]

handed over the coin.

"I think we left my stomach back there on that first curve," he said wanly. "But don't bother going back for it. The way I feel now I won't be needing it for some time."

He barely got inside the door of the café before the bald little Martian proprietor came hurrying nervously to meet him.

"You promised to make no trouble!" the Martian chattered. "And anyway the young man with the red face and the tousled hair has gone."

"Gone?" Barnes repeated blankly.

"He passed out just after you and the lady left. He snored very loud and my regular patrons did not like it. So I put him in a taxi and sent him to the Hotel Ares."

Barnes turned and hurried back to his taxi. The Hotel Ares was only six blocks away. The driver got there in a little less than three units, and stopped in his usual spectacular fashion. Barnes again picked himself gingerly up off the floor.

"You ought to take those cushions off the seat and put them down where they'd do some good," he remarked disgustedly.

The Hotel Ares was a better class hostelry, patronized largely by musicians and theater people. It was tall for a Martian building, its solid bulk towering three stories above the street.

A moon-faced little Ionian was on duty behind the desk in the ornately decorated lobby.

"Sure, Mr. Murray is here," the Ionian said in answer to Barnes' query. "Mr. Murray is a so old friend of this house. A taxi driver brought him in quite a while ago. He was—you know." The clerk shrugged expressive shoulders.

"Yeah, I know," Barnes said. "He was blotto. Give him a ring. I want to talk to him."

The Ionian fiddled with the visiphone board for a moment, then announced:

"He makes no answer."

"Give me a key to his room," Barnes demanded. "It's important that I see him."

"But I can not do such," the Ionian wailed. "It is against the rules to so disturb a guest who has retired!"

Barnes impatiently slammed his press card down on the desk.

"Listen, dim-wit!" he barked. "This happens to be a matter of life or death! Are you going to hand me that key or do I step out and call a gendarme?"

THE card convinced the clerk. Alienating the press was not a policy of the Hotel Ares. He took a master key-tube from the rack and led the way to the lift.

Murray's room was on the third floor. Repeated knocks brought no sign of life from within. The clerk flashed the thin ray of his key-tube into the light-activated mechanism of the lock and opened the door. They went in.

The bed was rumpled as though recently slept in, but the room was empty. Chill dry air from the surrounding desert blew in through an open pair of French windows.

They stepped over to the windows and out upon a small balcony to which they opened. Barnes looked down over the low railing and caught his breath sharply as he saw the thing that he had been dreading.

There was a basement areaway directly under the balcony, lighted by a single neonsten bulb. Sprawled grotesquely on the stone surface was the crumpled and broken body of a man.

It took them a scant minute to drop to the basement level and reach the areaway. The body was that of Johnny Murray. He had hurtled head-first down upon the stone paving. His skull had burst like an over-ripe melon. Barnes shuddered and turned away.

"What a pity!" the little Ionian moaned. "The poor Hotel Ares—to have a so horrible accident happen here!"

"Yeah," Barnes said caustically, "very inconsiderate of Johnny. He should have picked some other hotel to fall out of."

Barnes looked moodily up at the balcony far overhead.

"Of course Johnny could have been

thrown off that balcony," he said thoughtfully, "but then that wouldn't make sense. No one would have any reason to sneak in and murder an innocent kohl-gong drummer. No, it must have been an accident—merely a soak falling off a balcony. Just the same, little man," he said to the clerk, "I'm glad you don't happen to wear glasses."

"Wear glasses?" the Ionian stammered. "I do not understand!"

"That makes two of us," Barnes said bitterly. "All I know is that I seem to be a walking pestilence of some kind. People who talk to me usually die violently immediately afterward."

"But I—I have been talking to you!" the clerk faltered.

"Yes," Barnes agreed unfeelingly, "so you have, haven't you?" He turned his back upon the bulging-eyed Ionian and returned to the street.

He paid off his taxi driver and started for his own hotel on foot. The Palais was only three blocks away and he felt an irresistible craving for both exercise and fresh air. It lacked only a few units of the Martian hour of mid-dark. High overhead, the two satellites of the Red Planet, Deimos and Phobos, traced paths of silver splendor across the brilliantly starred blackness of the sky.

There were other things up there in that cloudless sky—long, slender cylindrical shapes that were visible only when their bulk blotted out the stars beyond them or showed in brief silhouette as they glided swiftly and silently across the glowing disc of one of the two moons. For the first time in a hundred Martian years warships were on night patrol over Anzoc, capital city of Khaldor.

THE street was deserted save for a lone pre-game celebrant far down the block who was arguing heatedly with a quite unresponsive light-post. Barnes strode briskly along, gratefully dragging great breaths of the thin, crisp air deep into his lungs.

His rugged face was grimly thoughtful as he reviewed the night's events. The happenings of the past hour had given startling proof of the vast scope of the unseen power that sought to kindle the fires of war throughout Mars. At the same time those tragic happenings had given clear proof that he must be on the right track insofar as the mysterious shining-eyed men were concerned.

The mere thought of shadowy figures whose strange glasses shielded eyes that otherwise shone with eerie green fire in the darkness made Barnes' lips twist wryly. The idea seemed like something dreamed up by a *laamke* smoker who had mixed a little opium in with the powerful Venusian narcotic weed.

Still, in some way those men with the strangely glowing eyes must be vitally connected with the heart of the mystery. Johnny Murray and the stevedore convict had spoken of those eyes of eldritch fire—and both men had promptly died. Those two deaths were too absolutely pat ever to be dismissed as mere accidents.

The thought occurred to Barnes with shocking suddenness that a third "accident" could easily happen, with himself as the victim. He hurriedly left the building side of the pavement and continued his walk along the extreme edge of the curb, safely beyond range of any lethal objects that might be dropped from windows or roofs.

He kept a nervously watchful eye upon every darkened hallway he passed. It was with a shame-faced feeling of frank relief that he finally stepped into the gaudily decorated lobby of the Hotel Palais.

When he went on upstairs, and opened the door of his second-story room, he almost staggered at the appalling atmosphere that met him. The place was hotter than the inside of an infantryman's boot, but he had expected that. What he had not expected was the weird and utterly impossible aroma of the object that Merky held clamped over one eye.

It was a fist-sized hunk of Venusian gralzhi fish. Mercurians and Venusian swamp tribes believed it was a certain cure for black eyes. Other races didn't dispute it, but claimed that the black eye was far preferable to the cure. In the matter of sheer overpowering odor

the gralzhi made even the deadest of other fish seem like attar of roses.

Barnes strode hastily across the room and flung the windows wide to the inrush of cold pure air.

"Merky," he said disgustedly, "the only possible way any normal being could ever associate comfortably with a Mercurian would be to have a constant and terrific cold in the head! What's the idea of that slab of defunct delicatessen?"

MERKY lowered the fish to show one of the most magnificent shiners that Barnes had ever gazed upon. Looking closer, he saw that other portions of the leathery little gnome were in an advanced state of disrepair.

"What in the name of the nine lavender gods of Gannymede happened to you?" he demanded. "Building fall on you?"

"I take yellow-head girl to Hotel Anzoc," Merky answered. "Jumbo female bodyguard meet me in lobby. Jumbo think I get yellow-head blotto. Jumbo sock me."

Barnes shook his head chidingly. "You must be getting fragile, Merky. I didn't think any woman, not even that Jovian dreadnaught, could dent a Mercurian with her naked fist."

"Jumbo no use fist," Merky said indignantly. "She hit me with billiard table!"

"Well, take your shiner into the bathroom and turn the revita ray on it," Barnes ordered. "Five minutes raying will fix it up. And I don't have to tell you what to do with that odoriferous hunk of over-ripe sardine."

Merky g r u m b l i n g l y departed. Barnes went over to the visiphone and called Stellar. Gallard's irascible face appeared upon the screen.

"Gil, haven't you got a home?" Barnes asked wearily.

"Not till this mess is over," Gallard grunted. "What new nightmare have you dreamed up now?"

"No nightmare. Cold facts. Two dead men, both of them murdered. But you're going to have to play them down as merely accidents."

He swiftly sketched the details of the deaths of Johnny Murray and the stevedore. When he had finished, Gallard's froglike face purpled apoplectically.

"Why play 'em down as accidents, Val?" he exploded. "You've got enough now to break scare-heads in every sheet in the System! Why delay and risk somebody else scooping us?"

"Nobody's going to scoop us," Barnes said calmly. "We've got a fair story now, yes, but if we hold it till we get the rest of the pieces to fill in we'll have an exclusive on the smash story of the century. Get all that stuff together I asked you for a while ago, and I'll be down in the morning to start prowling for the other pieces."

CHAPTER VI

Voice from the Red Haze

THE sun was well up in the clear pale sky when Val Barnes strolled leisurely down to the Stellar Building the next morning. The street was thronged with a motley array of sports lovers from all over the System. There was a carefree holiday spirit in the jostling crowds that for the moment shoved the darkly hovering threat of war clouds far into the background.

Barnes' stomach was comfortably filled with an excellent breakfast of Titanian spiced sausage, Neptune glacier berries, and Terrestrial hot cakes. He felt well satisfied with himself.

But his satisfaction ended when he entered Gallard's office. Gallard's floridly bejowled face suggested a volcano about to erupt.

"Where were you last night?" he demanded.

"At the Hotel Palais."

"Yeah? Strange they couldn't find your name on the register. I've been calling there for the last hundred units."

"I was registered under the name of Herman Q. Zunk," Barnes explained gently. "I thought I might sleep bet-

ter that way. It seems I was right."

Gallard snorted. "And while you slept things happened. Your yellow-haired girl friend seems to have arisen a little earlier than you did. Take a look at the morning edition."

Gallard snapped the visual stud on the big telenews wall-screen. Barnes watched the story scroll roll upward:

By Amber Starr

ANZOC, MARS, Via CTS. A man died in this city last night, crushed by the wheels of a speeding car. He was a ragged, red-robed Martian hermit, so obscure that even his name is unknown. On the Anzoc police blotter his death is listed as merely another fatal accident caused by some unknown hit-and-run driver.

This tragic death may not have been the accident it seemed. It may have been a case of ruthless, cold blooded murder!

The hermit's solitary home was in the desert wastes that lie far to the north of Anzoc. Somewhere in those wild, unknown barrens, he claimed, he stumbled upon a weird and terrible story. Yesterday he came to Anzoc to tell that story to his fellow men. All day he shouted it from a street-corner:

"There is blood on the sun! War's red clouds swoop down upon doomed Mars! The Great Horned Ones have arisen and again the Cloven Hoof makes its trail of lethal dread through the darkness of the night. The Ancient Demons have returned to sow their horrid crop of death, of wars, of utter destruction. Awake, ye blind and stupid men of Mars, before it is forever too late!"

Those who listened merely laughed and passed on, dismissing it as the wild harangue of a half-demented recluse. And last night, some thirty units after mid-dark, a speeding car in the 7g59 block on Grand Boulevard sent life hurtling from the broken body of the red-robed figure who had spoken from the street-corner.

What if the jeering crowds were wrong when they dismissed the hermit's message as the mere maunderings of an unbalanced mind? What if that story, incredibly fantastic though it seemed, were really stark and terrible truth, a truth so dangerous that no man could speak it aloud and live?

After all, the Horned Ones of ancient legend *have* again appeared in a score of places throughout a System that had not known their evil presence for millennia. And the appearance of those demoniac figures from the dark past *did* with terrifying and unexplainable exactness coincide with the first threat of the grim war clouds that today menace all Mars.

It is possible that in some strange manner there really is a definite connection between the arrival of the demon figures and the rising tide of threatened war. And if that is the case, it is also possible that the death of this hermit was no mere traffic accident. He may have died because those dark powers dared not let him live and continue shouting his dangerous story abroad, and so they snuffed his life out as callously as one would crush a fly!

AMBER STARR'S story went on, citing a list of incidents and dates to bolster her sensational theme. When the story finally ended and Gallard snapped the telenews screen off, Barnes shook his head wonderingly.

"What a marvelous flock of nightmares little taffy-head must have had last night!" he commented. "Maybe it was something she drank."

"You don't believe the hermit was killed because he talked too much?" Gallard asked.

"I do not. All Martian hermits talk too much. When awake, they do nothing else. The bewhiskered gentleman in the red nightgown was smacked by some joy-rider. It was an accident, pure and simple."

Gallard shrugged his plump shoulders.

"You're probably right," he admitted. "Amber's yarn is cuckoo, but at least it made a hot enough story to get on the ether with, and that's more than Stellar has been able to do with your efforts so far. We've got to piece that stuff of yours together enough that we can shoot some kind of a story on it, Val."

He picked up a bulky sheaf of papers from the desk and handed it to Barnes.

"Here are the transcripts of the telenews stories on all the various provocative incidents between Khaldor and Lakla. The sheet on top is a list of our correspondents in the two countries. I called them last night and told them what to try to get for you. They're waiting to report. Get in there in the first copy room and start going. If you'd got here when you should this morning you'd have been half-way through by now."

"Yes, Mr. Lagree," Barnes said, with a mock salute.

He took the papers and went into the small copy-receiving room next door to Gallard's office,

There followed a long stretch of the hardest work that Barnes had done for some little time. There were two visiphone screens in the room and he promptly had both of them glowing. By the time he drew the breath that automatically lighted the pyrone tip of his second cigarette he had an entire panel of Stellar's main switchboard tied up with his waiting calls.

He talked to men in every corner of the farflung web that made up Stellar's vast newsgathering organization in the towns and villages of Mars' two greatest nations. They had been working since before mid-dark of the preceding night, gathering the detailed information that Gallard had ordered.

They gave it to Barnes now, and as he listened to the steady stream of items he found a strange and incredible fabric taking shape before him. Taken singly, the various items meant little. When woven into a composite whole they made a pattern of startling significance and baffling mystery.

Mid-sun came and went, and the pile of cigarette stubs in the big tray at Barnes' elbow became a miniature mountain. Then a correspondent in the distant Khaldorian city of Rysse, where a giant artificial lake was the boundary between Khaldor and Lakla, contributed an item that promised the first real hint of an eldritch central heart around which the entire weird pattern might be fashioned.

THE man, a keen-faced young Martian, gave a brief rehash of the Rysse incident of many months ago, when the commander of a Khaldorian submarine had through some tragic error sent a detonite torpedo crashing into a Laklan fishing boat. Then the correspondent held up to the visiphone screen something that looked like a small square of water-wrinkled parchment.

"As you probably know, Mr. Barnes," he said, "after the accident the commander responsible for it committed suicide by deliberately opening the valves of his craft, drowning himself and his entire crew. When they finally raised the boat, it was found that the commander had apparently made death for himself doubly certain by firing a detonite bullet into his brain, for the entire top of his skull was an unrecognizable pulp.

"I went on board and found this hidden in a corner of the commander's desk. The ink was waterproof and immersion had not harmed it. I thought it might have been a dying message he had written, but it didn't seem to make any sense, so I finally dropped the idea. You can read the message for yourself."

The Martian turned the parchment toward Barnes. He read the few words, written in a scrawl so sprawling and shaky as to be almost undecipherable:

Not myself—it was—the—Brain Spider—

"Brother, you've really got something there!" Barnes said exultantly. "In fact, you've hit the jack-pot. That scrap of writing looks like just what I've been waiting for. Thanks a plenty!"

He snapped the connection off, and leaned back in his chair. His gray eyes were narrowed in thought.

"The Brain Spider," he repeated to himself. "That's what Ars Kader was trying to say to me when he died. I wonder—could the Brain Spider by any chance be a fancy name for the Mr. Big who is behind this whole fantastic mess?"

There were only a few other men waiting to report, and all were minor figures. Barnes called the main operator, told her to make written transcriptions of the remaining reports, and returned to Gallard's office.

"Get anything?" Gallard asked.

"Puh-lenty. But first, tell me something. I meant to ask you before and forgot. Just how did you get the tip about the expected blow-off at the game today? And about what later happened to Nesk Balon on the *Empress of Mars?*"

"The same way that we've been tipped off in advance about every provocative incident that's happened in the past two years. A visiphone connection comes in with the screen

showing nothing but a luminous reddish haze. Out of that haze a voice gives us the information briefly, then signs off. It's always been the same voice. Once you hear it, you never forget it. Makes you think of snakes, and spiders, and crawling things, if you know what I mean."

"Spiders, huh?" Barnes said musingly. "It might be the Brain Spider in person, at that."

"The who?"

BARNES told him of the cryptic message on the water-soaked parchment.

"That ties right in with what Ars Kader seemed to be trying to say when he died," Gallard admitted. "The Brain Spider. That could be the name of an individual, or of an organization, for that matter. Something of the kind must really exist when two different men try so hard to name it with their dying words. How does it hook up with the rest of the dope you got from the boys?"

"I'll be hanged if I know, Gil," Barnes said frankly. "They gave me enough to convince me that we're definitely on the right trail to one of the biggest yarns in the history of the Solar System. But there are too many vital pieces missing from the picture yet to make any real sense out of it. I'll sketch what I got for you. You can add the various items up and see what answer you get."

CHAPTER VII

Spider's Death Web

FOR Gallard's benefit, Barnes ticked off the points one by one upon his fingers.

"The principal figure in every provocative incident to date," he recounted, "has worn heavy-lensed glasses. Some of them had worn them for years, but most of them started wearing the specs only a few weeks before the incident. Not one single pair of those glasses can be found for examination today, and no pair has ever been examined in the past.

"In the case of Ars Kader and the mystery man who hired the stevedores the glasses seem to have been worn to hide the fact that without them the wearer's eyes had a strange luminosity in the dark. If that was the case with these two men, Gil, it's reasonable to assume that it was also the reason the specs were worn in the rest of the cases.

"Those shining eyes," Barnes continued, "seem to me to indicate that some kind of a new drug may be involved that enables the Brain Spider to exercise absolute control over a wide-flung list of helpless addicts. The Saturnian narcotic, *phosgo*, for example, sometimes gives a slight luminous sheen to the pupils of its addicts. The drug used in the present instance, however, would have to affect the retina; otherwise, the mere wearing of glasses wouldn't screen the glow when seen from the side.

"Another reason I suspect a drug is the fact that in no case has an unmutilated body of an incident perpetrator ever survived. The few who did not vanish completely had their skulls obliterated beyond recognition, as in the cases of the submarine commander and Ars Kader. The reason for this invariable elimination of the skulls could easily be because of degenerative drug effects in the brain that would be discovered if they were left to face an autopsy intact."

"That reminds me, Val," Gallard broke in. "The medico's final report on Ars Kader came over while you were busy in there."

"What did he think made Kader's skull dissolve in that ghastly manner?"

"He used up three pages of long-winded medical terms, that added up to a final admission that he didn't have the faintest idea. Said it looked as if Kader's brain was eaten completely away by some fiendishly powerful acid, but that would be impossible, of course."

"Maybe not," Barnes said. "I saw him pop something in his mouth just before his head started to melt. It might have been a substance that com-

bined chemically with the other drug that was already in his system."

Barnes leaned forward, as he went on earnestly.

"Everything we've got, Gil, points to some new and weirdly powerful drug being used. There's the luminosity of the eyes. There's the invariable vanishing or mutilation of the skulls. And there's the additional fact that almost immediately after the various victims donned those glasses, there was a marked and unpleasant change in their personal characters. It was apparently in an effort to keep this from being noticed that only bachelors and others living alone were selected, but the change was too great to be hidden. It was noticed by everyone around them."

"You're making out a good case for a witch-brew of some kind," Gallard conceded. "Got anything more?"

"Nope. That's the works."

GALLARD drummed his fingers thoughtfully on the arm of his chair.

"We've got enough to break a story right now, but if we did we'd lose all chance of getting a blamed sight bigger yarn exclusive. Tell you what, Val. We'll take a chance and hold off a little longer till we see if we can't uncover the whole thing. We've at least got some idea now what we're looking for. Let it stand till after the game. Maybe whatever happens there will give us a new lead."

"If anything does happen," Barnes said dubiously.

"Don't worry, it'll happen," Gallard said. "That guy in the reddish haze has never been wrong yet. When Old Snake Voice says something is going to happen, it happens. But if you don't step on it, you're not going to be there to see it."

Barnes glanced at the watch-button on his sleeve, and whistled in consternation.

"I'd forgotten all about the time!" he exclaimed. "Only eight units till the kick-offs now. Got a press plane around I can grab?"

"There's a couple of emergency boats up on the roof. Take one of them. Here's your seat ducat and a pair of teleglasses."

"Okay, brother. I'm on my way!"

Barnes went to the roof and entered one of the two trim little speed planes parked there.

"The Canal Bowl, James," he told the pilot, "and don't spare the rockets!"

The pilot threw full power into the keel gravity screen. Gravitational ties to the planet were abruptly sundered, and the little craft shot upward and eastward like a pellet of mud being flung from the tire of a spinning wagon wheel. The pilot deftly manipulated the stubby wings to bring them around in a steeply banked turn, and kicked on the stern rocket jets that sent them hurtling westward.

In the clear sun-drenched air around them scores of other small craft, most of them taxiplanes, streamed toward the west. There was a brief flashing glimpse of the multicolored roofs of Anzoc far below them. Then five long Martian miles of red sand laced by roads of black ladrox along which streams of gamewardbound cars still crawled like sluggish snakes. Then the Bowl itself, located in the right angle where a broad feeder artery brought to the Grand Canal its precious freight of water from the polar cap thousands of miles to the north.

The Canal Bowl, largest sports structure in the System, was a giant oval with its outer rim towering a sheer thousand Terrestrial feet above the desert floor. With a seating capacity of slightly over two hundred thousand, it was bulky enough to be discernible as a definite speck in the highest powered telescopes of Earth and Jupiter when those two neighbors swung close enough to the Red Planet.

Barnes looked at the jam of planes swarming about the traffic control ships far above the ten main ground entrances to the Bowl, and shook his head. The traffic officers were sending the craft down in a steady stream to the small landing areas, but in the last-minute rush there were two new planes arriving overhead for every

one that descended.

"Never get in before half time if we get trapped in that mess," Barnes said. "Got a hop suit on board?"

THE pilot jerked a thumb toward a small locker. Barnes fished a suit out of it and swiftly donned the cowled coverall garment of featherweight metallic netting.

"Swing as low as you can before I bail out," he ordered. "And try to pick a spot clear enough that I won't part somebody's hair when I land."

The pilot swooped down to within a scant one hundred feet of a small refreshment stand near one of the southern gates. Barnes snapped on the battery of his suit and stepped over the edge of the open cockpit. With his weight cut to a tiny fraction of normal by the gravity-screening current that flowed through the netting, he drifted down as easily as a falling feather.

The only clear space among the milling crowds around the gate was the roof of the refreshment stand itself. Barnes was no expert as a hop suit jumper, and the ten foot square surface offered an appalingly small target. It was only by dint of some fast and frenzied arm flapping that he finaly managed to shift his course enough to land on the extreme edge of the roof.

He clambered down one of the supporting posts, to the pop-eyed amazement of a fat Martian counterman who was ladling out beakers of lavender soprenade. He snapped his suit battery off, and folded the flimsy garment into a wad small enough to stuff into his pocket.

A flash of his press card brought prompt and friendly service from a publicity-minded cop who cleared a path for him to the nearest turnstile. Half a unit later he was on the swiftly moving ribbon of flexible ladrox that flowed down a corridor for the quarter of a Terrestrial mile between the gate and the section of the Bowl where his seat was located.

It was a perfect seat, half-way down the sloping side of the great Bowl, and squarely opposite the one-hundred-yard line. Like all other seats in the central "luxury" section, it was a large, comfortably padded arm-chair of syntheserge, the soft, fluffy, weatherproof fabric manufactured from the granite of Mars' crumbling northern mountains.

Barnes settled himself and looked around. For once in the history of the Anzoc Chamber of Commerce, that optimistic body had been too conservative. Instead of the 200,000 spectators it had been claimed would be present, there were nearer a quarter of a million packed inside the huge Bowl.

There was a distinctly local as well as a planetary aspect to the game, for the Martian champion Aggies were from Anzoc. As a result, the central section for fifty yards on either side of Barnes' seat was filled almost exclusively with Khaldorians, with smaller contingents from other Martian nations on either flank.

The section directly across the field was occupied by Venusian followers of the scintillating Poly squad, champion of the cloud-shrouded planet, and winner over Earth in the recent semi-final game at Chicapolis. Scattered throughout the rest of the gigantic Bowl were representatives of every sport-loving race in the System, from gnomelike little Mercurians to sleepy-eyed, slow-moving giants from dark and frigid Neptune.

SWARMS of vendors circulated through the aisles, crying the favorite foods and milder drinks of a dozen different planets and major moons. Their shouts recalled to Barnes' pained attention the fact that he had had nothing to eat since breakfast. He hailed one of the vendors and bought a large cluster of luscious purple and gold plum-grapes from Titan's famous Wistful Valley vineyards.

It was nearly time for the twin kick-offs. The voice of an announcer reading the lineups came softly through the small grilles set in the back of every other seat. On the big playing field far below him, Barnes saw the teams leave the turf for the sidelines, their pregame practice over.

He donned the pair of teleglasses that Gallard had given him. The field leaped as by magic to almost within arm's length in the wide field of the gogglelike lenses. He fished out a cigarette, and lounged back in solid comfort.

His repose came to an abrupt and painful end. Someone came in from the aisle toward the vacant chair at his left. He was a trifle slow in drawing his long legs in out of the way. A small sharp heel ground into his shin with unerring accuracy and savage vigor.

He yelped in anguish, and snatched the teleglasses from his eyes. The offending party was just settling into the seat beside him. She was small, blond, and serenely cool in a chic green sweater and heather sports skirt. Her piquantly molded face was softly tanned, faintly malicious, and thoroughly familiar.

"I might have known it would be you!" Barnes grunted ungraciously. "Are you making a career of following me around? It's getting to the place that I wouldn't be surprised to shake you out of one of my shoes any morning."

"I am not following you around, Mr. Barnes," she answered sweetly. "That would be my idea of absolute zero in the way of entertainment. As for my being here this afternoon, I understood the game was to be open to the public."

Barnes rubbed his aching shin. "And with the whole Canal Bowl to walk in, I suppose it was an accident you stepped on me. What are you wearing anyway—spurs?"

"Unfortunately, no. But it's an idea."

Barnes glanced at the flawless perfection of the face above the small, imperiously tilted chin, and began to mellow in spite of himself. Cosmic's Golden Girl might be a thorough and unmitigated pain in the neck in a professional way, but there was no denying the fact that she was also about the most delectable sight that Barnes' eyes had ever rested upon.

He was surprised to find himself suddenly thinking that an afternoon in such attractive company shouldn't be too hard to take. He turned on the full power of his best Sunday smile.

"It's a beautiful day," he said. "There's a nice game coming up, and we're both free, white, and below the age of ninety. What say we stop pulling each other's hair for the time being, and just sort of enjoy things?"

Amber's eyes widened in mock surprise. "Mr. Barnes, you amaze me," she murmured.

She paused for a moment as though studying the proposal. Then her cheeks dimpled in swift consent.

"All right, it's a deal," she agreed. "For the time being, we're noncombatants. Just a couple of folks having a good time at a football game."

CHAPTER VIII

Grid Battle of the Planets

EERILY the thin wail of a two-toned horn came from the broadcast grilles, warning that only one time unit remained before the kick-offs.

Amber took a pair of teleglasses from her *laht*-skin handbag and put them on. Barnes viewed the result with pleased surprise. Teleglasses made most wearers look like bug-eyed atrocities from the Great Black Swamp of Venus. Amber Starr managed to achieve the miracle of still looking both human and attractive in the enormous goggle lenses. Barnes hated to don his own glasses and turn his attention to the playing field.

The Aggies had won the toss and had elected to receive. Poly had the two balls teed up on its own fifty-yard line, with the two kickers back ten yards, and the remaining twenty players in a long line on either side of the balls.

The shrill blast of the scrimmage referee's whistle sounded. The two kickers ran forward, their steps perfectly timed. The two balls, one white and the other black, soared high and deep into the territory across the hundred-yard line where the Aggie

twenty-two was deployed to receive them.

The game was on.

Barnes felt his spine tingle with the thrill that the thud of foot upon *laht*-skin had always brought to him, ever since the days when he had been an All-Terrestrial inner right halfback at the University of Ohiana. It was a grand game. No wonder that with the coming of interplanetary travel this Terrestrial sport had quickly become the favorite of the System, dropping into obscurity such feeble competitors as Venusian water tennis, Titanian bowling archery, and even the murderous sword hockey that was once the favorite of Mars.

It must have been a great game even far back in the Twentieth Century when Terrestrial crowds thronged to see it played in its laughably primitive and abbreviated form, with a scant handful of eleven players on a side and only one ball in play on the cramped little field. The modern version, with a full squad of twenty-two men on each side, and two balls in motion on every play, was a sport so magnificently complex that its possibilities were almost endless.

On plays where one team had both balls the game still bore some resemblance to its early progenitor. A touchdown with either ball scored five points, and a field goal with either was good for two points. On scrimmage plays where no score was made, the net advance or loss was calculated by averaging the progress of the two balls.

But it was when each team had possession of a ball that the modern game entered its real glory. With every man on the field eligible for either offensive or defensive play as his quarterbacks might direct, with each team both attacking with its own ball and defending against its opponent's ball on every play, it became a spectacle of dazzling speed and intricate strategy.

Today's game was between two of the best twenty-twos in the long history of interplanetary play. One of the squads was from Venus and the other from Mars, but neither of the home planets had a monopoly of the players making up its team.

BOTH were large universities whose splendid curriculums drew students from all parts of the System. And, resentful alumni of other schools sometimes claimed, both were also universities which were not averse to offering suitable inducements to any Systemian youth who had sufficient prowess with a *laht*-skin.

There were boys down there on the two-hundred-yard-long gridiron from every major globe in the System, with the exception of Mercury and Neptune. Mercurians were too small for big league play, and Neptunians were

[*Turn Page*]

too slow, both physically and mentally.

Poly depended upon sheer power in its crushing attack, and ran heavily to Jovian linesmen, with their ponderously muscular five-hundred-pound bodies. The Aggies' flashingly swift and deceptive offensive featured fleet Venusians, Europans, and Ganymedeans. Most of the quarterbacks and halfbacks of each team were either Terrestrial or Martian.

The black ball and the white one, driven by the powerful toes of Poly's two Jovian kickers, soared one hundred and thirty yards through the Martian sunshine before dropping into the waiting arms of Aggie receivers. The white ball was taken by Paezzl, inner right halfback, the black one by Reggs, left fullback.

Paezzl, running behind a closely knit interference of sixteen men, brought the ball back to within a yard of the midstripe before a hurtling quarter ton of Jovian guard brought both interference and runner to a crashing halt. Reggs, working behind only four men, was nailed by the tenaciously gripping hands of a blue-skinned Ganymedean tackler back on the sixty-yard line.

The two balls were lined up on the Aggies' eighty-yard line. The players lined up with fourteen men in the forward wall and eight in the backfield. At the barked signal of the Aggies' senior quarterback the two centers sent the balls flashing back.

The right quarterback took the white ball and cut across in a long sweeping run around left end. The left fullback took the black ball, faked a lateral to one of the four halfbacks, then sent a long pass floating diagonally down the field toward a racing end.

The end run picked up thirty yards. The pass was not so forunate. At the last split unit a blue-clad Poly back flashed in front of the Aggie receiver, intercepted the *laht*-skin, and raced it back for forty yards before an Aggie tackler brought him to the ground.

There followed fifty units of the best football that Barnes had ever seen. Sometimes one team had both balls; more often they had one ball each. There were twin line plunges, and opposing line smashes. Arching punts passed floating forward passes in mid-air. On one play, Poly's right quarterback flipped a touchdown pass fifty yards to his own receiver, then wheeled to his right and cut down a speeding Aggie back who had broken into the open with the other ball.

THE sheer weight and power of Poly's crushing attack began to tell, and near the end of the second quarter they led the red-clad Aggies by a score of 32 to 17. Then, with less than a single time unit remaining before the end of the half, Aggie pulled a dazzling cross pass with both balls from deep in its own territory.

Perfect downfield blocking cut the heavy Poly tacklers down like stricken pachyderms, and the fleet Aggie receivers flashed on to football's greatest rarity—a double score with both balls crossing the goal line on the same play. The points for the two touchdowns, plus the bonus of five extra points for the feat, left the two teams deadlocked when the timers' sirens screamed to end the half.

Barnes and Amber removed their teleglasses and blinked their eyes in grateful relief from fifty solid units of peering through the powerful lenses. Barnes fished a package of cigarettes from his pocket and offered one to Amber. She started to take it, then shook her head and drew a package of her own from her handbag.

"I don't really feel like taking a nap this time, Mr. Barnes," she explained.

Barnes grinned. "You don't happen to have that little somno-gas gat parked somewhere in that undersized *laht*-skin suitcase, do you?"

Amber's flashing smile showed white, perfect teeth.

"It's in here, yes," she admitted, "but don't let that worry you. That Michael O'Fynn of yours was a heel trick last night, but I'm not packing any grudge. After all, I had it coming."

Barnes whistled softly in amazement.

"I wouldn't have believed it if I

hadn't heard it. Not only is the gal one of the best looking pieces of scenery in the entire System, not only is she possessed of enough brains to keep her pretty mouth shut and not ask dumb questions during a football game, but in addition she possesses the rarest of all feminine virtues—a sense of sportsmanship!"

"Thank you," Amber said demurely. "I can cook, too."

"If only you weren't a she-reporter!" Barnes mourned.

"And what is so wrong with my being a reporter?"

There was a thin edge of steel beneath Amber's softly voiced question.

"Do we have to go into all that again?" Barnes asked wearily. "Listen, Golden Girl. You're nice to be with. You're very, very easy on the eyes. You're even intelligent. As a human being, I like you. But as a reporter, you are distinctly a fly in my bread and butter. Gals and journalism just don't mix."

"As, for instance?" Amber inquired.

THERE was no mistaking the hostility in the frosty blue of her eyes. The armistice was definitely over.

"As, for instance, that prize nightmare you perpetrated in this morning's telenews."

"You do not believe that the Ancient Horned Ones have really appeared again throughout the System?"

"I do not believe that such cowlike gentry ever existed," Barnes said flatly. "And I believe still less that a long-tailed bogy man was driving that hit-and-run car on Grand Boulevard last night."

"I suppose it would be quite impossible for one or more of those nonexistent Horned Ones to appear elsewhere, such as here at this game this afternoon?"

"You suppose correctly. Be sensible, lady. You're here for the same reason I am, of course. Cosmic was tipped, just as Stellar was—probably by the same spooky Voice of Mystery warbling from a crimson haze. It's possible something may really happen. But it won't be an old-time devil in a pair of prop antlers and a suit of red underwear, arriving in a cloud of brimstone down there on the hundred-yard line. It will be something a lot more rational, and a lot more dangerous."

"Such as?"

Barnes' eyes roved around the Bowl, then above it.

"Such as that plane up there, maybe," he said, idly pointing to a tiny black speck high in the ash-blue sky.

As they watched, the plane dropped swiftly lower. Amber raised her teleglasses to her eyes.

"Much as it pains me to admit it, Mr. Barnes," she said tautly, "you may be right. That plane is a warcraft—and it is marked with Laklan insignia!"

CHAPTER IX

Preview of Inferno

HURTLING with the speed of a falling bullet, the plane sped Marsward. No teleglasses were needed now to see the yellow coloring of its cylindrical body and the solid black of the Laklan triangles on its stubby wings.

There was a ripple of scattered cries as various spectators throughout the Bowl glimpsed the oncoming craft, then the murmuring surge of a quarter of a million startled voices as the rest looked up and saw the ship flashing toward them out of the sky.

In the tensity of the moment the fingers of Amber's right hand dug with surprising strength into Barnes' left biceps, but neither of them knew it. A burly Martian Aggie grad, his coppery face flushed still darker by liberal quantities of brandor, got groggily to his feet in the section immediately to their left and shook a belligerent fist at the plane. In the section to their right, a plump Martian matron created a mild counter attraction by noisily fainting all over the place.

In the ornately ornamented royal box far below them, gorgeously uni-

formed staff officers buzzed protectingly around Prince Pehlor's shrunken, bespectacled little figure.

Out on the playing field the music of the massed bands of Poly and the Aggies died into silence as the musicians lowered their instruments and gaped skyward.

"How did a Laklan warplane ever get by the border?" Amber asked wonderingly. "Half the Khaldorian air fleet is on patrol there."

"That baby is a sealed cruiser with enough range to go from here to either moon," Barnes answered. "It was probably several hundred miles out in space when it crossed the border."

"And there isn't a Khaldorian warplane anywhere in sight!" Amber said. "Yesterday the sky over Anzoc was full of them."

"We've still got a few traffic cops to try to protect us, anyway," Barnes commented. "There they go now."

A dozen of the small, lightly armed skimmers swept upward in a loosely grouped mass. The sound of their wailing sirens floated eerily down to the gaping thousands.

They met the Laklan cruiser a thousand feet above the Bowl. Any possible lingering doubt as to the invader's menacing nature vanished.

Sheets of livid purple flame lashed from the cruiser's gun-ports and struck the traffic skimmers. The police planes went instantly and completely out of control, swooping away in blindly erratic paths that indicated that no longer were living hands at their controls.

"What happened?" Amber breathed tautly.

"Looked like mass murder!" Barnes grated. "Those poor devils never had the ghost of a chance!"

The yellow cruiser dropped still lower until it was only five hundred Terrestrial feet above the Bowl, then stopped and hovered squarely over the packed thousands in the Khaldorian section. A circular door opened in the belly of the craft. From inside the opening the voice of an amplifying unit boomed forth:

"Do not be afraid, ye of Lakla, of Ishwahr, of Raxo! The offering we bring is for those of Khaldor alone. Korlu nuts were offered Nesk Balon, and Nesk Balon died. In memory of the Khaldorian beast who murdered him we bring other and tastier morsels. Eat deeply of them, ye groveling swine of Khaldor!"

A STREAM of tiny objects poured from the circular opening. The door slid closed with a metallic clang. The cruiser rocketed skyward again, but its departure went almost unnoticed. Every eye among the dazed thousands in the Khaldorian section was fixed in dread fascination upon the cloud of tiny objects that settled slowly down toward them through the windless calm of the afternoon.

The falling objects were near enough now to be discerned as tiny globes of varicolored metal, the size of Terrestrial golf balls. They were either gossamer light in structure or else partially filled with some buoyant gas, for they descended with the soft slowness of falling snowflakes.

Their release had been aimed with superb accuracy. They settled downward in a vast, evenly spaced blanket that reached almost to the limits of the Khaldorian section, and no farther.

The many-hued globules made a sight of eldritch beauty in the pale sunlight in the last few moments before they struck. Had it not been for the blasted traffic planes, Barnes thought grimly, the shower of shimmering little bubbles might almost have been taken for some new and spectacular stunt on the between the halves program.

Then the first of the falling globules reached the top rim of the Bowl. Where each struck there was a flash of searing golden flame and a terrific explosion. Gaping holes appeared with shocking suddenness in the closely packed tiers of spectators. Fragments of flesh and chair fabric and Bowl masonry spattered in a weirdly mixed rain of stark horror.

The explosions shocked the crowd from its dazed stupor. The massed thousands broke for the exits in wild panic, but it was too late. Before

more than a scant handful could fight through the clogged aisles to the tunnel entrances, the rain of death moved inexorably down the slanting side of the Bowl upon them.

"Those things must be packed solidly with detonite!" Amber cried.

"Something worse than that," Barnes answered. "It takes a blow of several pounds to knock detonite off, but those babies seem to let go at the touch of a feather. And no detonite ever did half the fiendish damage they're doing!"

As the falling rain of deadly globules moved steadily down the side of the Bowl toward them the scene was literally a preview of the inferno. The globes were widely enough spaced that they struck only at intervals some ten feet apart, but their terrific power and the closely packed mass of the wildly stampeding crowd made each explosion a thing of tragic horror.

The air was hideous with the almost unbroken thunder of crashing reports, the shrieks of men and women driven mad by terror, and the shuddering moans of the maimed and dying. The acrid smell of explosive fumes blended with the raw, nauseating reek of blood.

IN MANY cases those who died instantly were the lucky ones. A gray-haired Martian sat in ashen-faced stupor, staring down at a body that ended at the waist. Another, a tall gaunt man in the gray uniform of the Khaldorian army, stood in the position of a man with hands upraised to shield his eyes—but he had no hands and no eyes.

The taste of horror was brown and bitter in Barnes' throat. He swept Amber's slender little figure close within the shelter of his arm.

"Come on!" he gasped. "We've at least got to try to get out of here!"

Their seats were next to the aisle and the entrance to one of the tunnel exits loomed a scant five yards beyond. The distance might as well have been miles, packed solidly as it was with a mass of men and women who fought and trampled each other in sheer mad panic.

Barnes looked up and saw that the first of the falling globules was nearly upon them. No possible time left to try to battle a path through the panic-stricken mob between them and the exit!

He wrenched one of the big armchairs loose from its base, tilted it forward, and huddled Amber's body and his own beneath its shelter. If they were lucky enough to escape a direct hit, it might at least serve as a shield against flying fragments.

There was a moment of tense waiting that seemed eternities long. Then their senses reeled as the wave of explosions reached them. The heavy chair lurched with bruising force against their closely curled bodies. The air was stifling with acrid fumes. Then the sound of crashing detonations moved on and below them.

They threw the chair back and staggered to their feet. Around them on every side the blasting globules had wrought terrific havoc. But in one place the tragic devastation had brought at least a scrap of good fortune in its wake.

A direct hit had blasted the aisle gruesomely clear of living bodies. Barnes grabbed Amber's arm and raced for the mouth of the exit tunnel.

The masonry of the aisle floor was slippery with torn flesh and spattered blood. They were half-way to the tunnel mouth when Amber's foot slipped. She fell with a force that twisted her arm from Barnes' grasp.

He turned to help her to her feet, then froze at the look of terror stamped upon her white face.

"Another of the death bubbles!" she gasped. "Right above us!"

Barnes whirled and looked up. Barely six feet above their heads, the tiny silver globe of a belated straggler from the main swarm was drifting inexorably down upon them.

There was still time enough for Barnes to leap safely clear, but no possible time for Amber even to scramble to her feet. Barnes stooped and snatched her slight figure from the floor.

He lunged desperately for the tun-

nel mouth. Knowing they had no chance to get safely distant now before the globule struck, he tried to huddle her body as much as possible in the shelter of his own. He had taken only two steps when the bubble struck the aisle floor behind them.

There was a terrific blast of air that picked Barnes up bodily and sent him hurtling headlong. He saw the scarred entrance of the tunnel rocketing toward him. Then something struck his head with a crashing force that obliterated all consciousness. . . .

HIS first waking sensation was of an aching head that seemed only one size smaller than the equatorial circumference of Jupiter. Then scattered aches and pains began to register from other parts of his body. The total effect seemed much the same as though he had just taken a long trip through the inside of a cement-mixer.

Painfully he opened his eyes. He was almost afraid to take personal inventory, but when he did he breathed a sigh of relief. He was bruised and scraped and generally sore, but apparently no parts were missing. Nothing seemed even to be broken, with the possible exception of his throbbing head.

There were a number of other people lying on the floor around him, most of them apparently no more seriously injured than he was. The room looked like one of the big vaults in the basement of the Canal Bowl.

He raised himself up on his elbows, then groaned as a twinge shot through his head.

"Take it easy, buddy." A sturdy figure in the soiled uniform of a Bowl maintenance man appeared out of the shadows. "Nothin' the matter of you that a headache tablet won't cure. Just a clunk on the bean and a few hunks of skin knocked off here and there."

Barnes got groggily to his feet.

"You don't happen to know whether Miss Starr was hurt, do you?" he asked. "She's the small blond girl who was with me when I got hit."

The man grinned. "I don't know what her name was, but there was a mighty good lookin' little blond sugar come taggin' along when they brought you in here. She left as soon as the doc said you were okay. When she was leavin' she made some crack about no mere hunk of concrete havin' any chance against that skull of yours."

"That was Miss Starr all right," Barnes said wryly. "My little pal! And again I have been thoroughly and completely scooped by that pint-sized portion of unadulterated arsenic!"

He headed for the door that the attendant indicated as the exit. In the hall outside he found the patiently waiting Merky.

"You get blonded again?" the little Mercurian queried imperturbably.

"Yes, I guess so," Barnes answered disgustedly. "Though the actual physical damage this time seems to have been done by a stray piece of the Bowl itself."

"Gallard say already got here covered," Merky said. "Say soon as you come to, you come see him quick."

"And a fine headache cure that'll be," Barnes said resignedly. "Oh, well, come on, let's go and get it over with."

CHAPTER X

Blonded Again

AS BARNES and Merky went down the hall to the outside exit, Barnes saw that that entire section of the Bowl's basement had been transformed into an emergency hospital. They passed doors from behind which came the heavy odor of antiseptics and the agonized groans of men and women. They caught glimpses of white-robed doctors working frenziedly to save what lives they could among the countless scores of savagely injured victims.

The space just outside the exit was a milling chaos of white-faced relatives, screaming police cars, and speeding ambulances. Merky led the way to the small press car that he had parked on the outskirts of the crowd.

The little Mercurian drove with an utterly suicidal abandon that made even the worst of Martian taxi drivers seem tame, but Barnes was too sore and aching to care. He sat with his eyes closed for most of the ride to the Stellar Building, trying to hang on to a head that seemed singularly bent upon floating away like a balloon.

Gallard's froglike face was sardonic as he greeted Barnes.

"Congratulations, Mr. Barnes!" he said. "It was one of the best stories you ever sent in. Perhaps you should use a ghost writer on your stuff all the time."

"Skip it, Gil!" Barnes growled. "I'm in no mood for kidding."

"I'm not kidding, sonny boy. During your little cat-nap you were covered very completely, and very capably, by a certain party who visiphoned a story in for you. The party's name was Miss Amber Starr."

Barnes' jaw sagged incredulously.

"That rap on the bean must have scrambled what few brains I have," he said. "I could have sworn that you said that Amber Starr sent a story in for me on that Bowl catastrophe."

"I did. Have a look."

Gallard turned on the telenews panel. Barnes read the story that Amber had sent in for him, then the one that she had done over her own signature for Cosmic. He had to admit grudgingly that both jobs were creditable pieces of reporting. In the story she had given Gallard she had even managed cleverly to simulate the tersely cynical tricks of phrasing that were hallmarks of the Val X. Barnes style.

Gallard snapped the big screen off.

"Got anything to add to it?" he asked.

Barnes shook his head.

"Nope. Taffy-Head got it all in. What a ghastly mess those devilish little globules made! Four thousand Khaldorians dead, and at least twice that many critically injured. That's the final straw, of course. Has war with Lakla been declared yet?"

"Not officially, but it might as well be. Lakla has been given an ultimatum. She must pay a heavy indemnity to Khaldor and turn over the commander of that death cruiser and all his crew to Khaldorian authorities for punishment. She has until tomorrow mid-sun to comply."

"Those terms are reasonable enough after what happened," Barnes said soberly. "I thought that by now war would be on full blast."

GALLARD was grim as he answered.

"It would be if Prince Pehlor had had his way," he said.

"After one of those bomb-bubbles nearly put a permanent part in his hair, our fire-eating little ruler wanted to send battle-wagons streaking for Lakla before the dust fairly settled in the Bowl. General Velnor and some more of the cooler heads talked him into at least giving the Laklans a final chance with an ultimatum."

"Level-headed old buzzard, General Velnor," Barnes commented. "I was with him in that Blue Jungle affair on Ganymede three years ago. I know he packs plenty of say-so in the Khaldorian High Council, but I didn't think anybody could stave off hostilities for even a few hours after that horror at the Bowl."

"It was the sheer size and insanity of the tragedy that made the delay possible," Gallard explained. "Velnor argued that it looked more like the fanatical act of an individual or a small group than something deliberately planned by Lakla as a nation. Most Laklans claim the same thing. They're willing to pay the indemnity, and they'd also be willing to turn the offenders over to Khaldor—only they can't find them. The cruiser and everyone on board has vanished completely."

"Probably at the bottom of some lake," Barnes said, "or crashed in some desolate mountain canyon a thousand miles from here. I imagine the crew were merely innocent dupes in the whole affair. But as for the commander—well, I suppose he wore glasses?"

Gallard nodded. "In all probability he was one of your shining-eyed drug

addicts. No way of ever knowing now. It's practically certain he won't be found in time to turn over to Khaldor by tomorrow mid-sun. And without him there's no way in the Galaxy to avert a war that will be the direst tragedy that ever struck this System!"

The two men were silent for a moment, each busy with his own somber thoughts. Then Gallard got up from his desk and walked restlessly over to where wide windows faced the west. Barnes joined him.

From their high vantage point they looked out over the low, sprawling buildings of Anzoc and far across the surrounding red sand wastes. The Martian sunset was always ruddy, but tonight it was far more so than usual. Dust storms on the distant desert had made the sun an eerie globe of stark blood-red as it hovered on the horizon.

"Blood on the sun," Barnes said.

"Yes," Gallard answered. "Today it's only red sand. Tomorrow it will be the red blood of human beings, slain by the tens of thousands down there in Anzoc, and in every other city in Khaldor and Lakla. You've seen plenty of jungle brawls involving relatively primitive peoples, Val, but have you any idea of what war between really advanced nations will mean?"

"I can guess," Barnes said wryly. "I had a little personal taste of it this afternoon."

"And it was only a taste," Gallard said. "Those bomb-bubbles probably had detonitine in them. It's a new and infinitely powerful explosive that Lakla developed recently. But a little more power in explosives means little. Ordinary detonite is already powerful enough that a single heavy bomb filled with it will level an entire city block, and the concussion will destroy all life for an area of several blocks on every side."

THE florid face of Barnes' superior was graver than the star reporter had ever seen it.

"This coming war, Val," the elder man went on, "will utilize weapons against which there is no practicable defense. Bomb-shelters would merely be death traps in which gas would wipe out every living thing. They've got a dozen new gases. Some rot the lungs, others the eyes, still others burn the skin and flesh away. There's a new one called *thrombinite* that stimulates the coagulative element in the blood, making the victim's blood almost instantly solidify in his arteries. No known mask will keep any of the really concentrated gases out."

"Robot planes will do most of the dirty work, I suppose," Barnes mused.

"Yes. Each battle-cruiser, hovering so high that it's practically in open space, will send down its fleet of close to a hundred robot planes. Each of the robots is merely a giant, highly maneuverable bomb. Ninety per cent of them can be shot out of the sky on the way down, and the remainder will still be enough to wreck half a city."

Gallard spread his plump hands in a gesture of weary hopelessness.

"Bombs are only a few death tools from a large and overflowing chest, Val," he said helplessly. "There'll be death by explosive, by flame, by gas, by shrapnel. Later, death by bacteria and fungi, by lightning blast and paralysis rays. Mass murder in the grand manner. Death with a Ph.D.!"

Barnes' gray eyes were thoughtful. "It could be stopped even now," he said slowly, "if we could uncover the Mr. Big who is behind the whole ghastly mess. We've got one advantage. We haven't run anything yet on this shining-eyed business. The Brain Spider, or whoever he is, doesn't know we're even on his trail."

"I've got all the boys working on it now," Gallard said, "but what's the use? There simply isn't time enough left, even if we turned over what we have to the Khaldorian Intelligence Service and had their entire working force added to our own."

"No dice there," Barnes said decisively. "In the first place, our stuff is so fragmentary and utterly bizarre that we'd be laughed out of the place with it if we went to Intelligence. In the second place, there might be one of the shining-eyed boys planted in a strategic position right there in the Intelligence organization."

"What are you going to do then?"

Gallard demanded.

"See if we can get a little more time to work in," Barnes said. "I know General Velnor pretty well. The old boy owes me at least one favor. I'm going to him, tell him everything we've got, and see if there's any possible way he can stretch the ultimatum time limit for a day or two."

Barnes stepped to the desk visiphone and put in a call to the War Building. Communications were already snarled in the red-tape web of impending warfare, but the name of Stellar carried enough weight to pierce the web. General Velnor was absent at the moment on an inspection tour of border defenses, but he would see Barnes at his office later in the evening.

"That's that," Barnes said as he clicked the visiphone screen off. "While I'm waiting I'll go over to my hotel and bounce a few million revita-rays off this weirdly throbbing skull of mine."

A LONG, luxurious soaking under the rays brought Barnes' battered physique nearly back to normal. He dressed and went down to the bar.

A three-decker journalists' club sandwich—consisting of equal parts of bourbon, brandor, and mobdex, taken rapidly in the order named, completed the rejuvenation the rays had started. Barnes decided to go calling. With Merky at the wheel, he headed for the Hotel Anzoc.

"Wait here," Barnes said, when they pulled up at the curb in front of the hotel. "I'll be right back."

"You betcha will," Merky said tersely. He looked moodily up toward where Amber Starr's quarters were on the third floor. "Better carry jump suit. Long way down, very hard landing!"

Barnes grinned. "Believe it or not, my pessimistic little friend, I go this time in peace and friendship."

Miss Starr was in, the languidly elegant Venusian desk clerk informed him, and would Mr. Barnes please go on up? Mr. Barnes did. The door was opened by Amber in person.

As Barnes followed his attractive hostess into the living-room of her suite, he marveled at the recuperative powers of the female of the species. A few Terrestrial hours ago this girl had been in the heart of the worst tragedy in the recorded history of Mars. Her face and clothing had been spattered by the blood of scores who had died horribly on every side of her. That same grisly death had missed her own body by scant inches. Yet now she looked as trimly immaculate and thoroughly composed as though she had spent the day in the soothing ray-baths of a beauty salon.

There was another change since he had last seen her, and a less pleasing one. At the game she had at least temporarily been a quite human and charmingly feminine person, frankly having a good time. Now she was again the icily efficient Blond Bombshell of journalistic fame, cool, mocking, and definitely antagonistic.

The friendly words of greeting Barnes had intended to say died in his throat.

"I won't be but a minute," he said stiffly. "I merely wanted to thank you for covering me on that Bowl yarn."

"Think nothing of it, Mr. Barnes," Amber said unconcernedly. "It was simply a matter of paying a debt. After all, you did save my life, and that was certainly worth one story in return. I trust the job was done to your satisfaction?"

There was something about the coolly mocking voice that abruptly shattered the last of the friendly intentions with which Barnes had come.

"The story was all right," he said ungraciously. "All right for a gal, that is. You missed some of the finer points, of course, and I didn't care a lot for your effort to burlesque my style. But I'm not blaming you. I'm sure you did the best you could."

MISS STARR opened and closed her mouth twice before she managed to answer. When words finally came, they were sheathed in glacial ice.

"Good night, Mr. Barnes. Too bad you must be going so soon."

"Oh, I'm not going yet," Barnes said. "I've got a lot more things to tell you, Golden Girl. I've just started."

"Yes?"

There was subtle menace in the rising inflection of Amber's voice. Barnes looked beyond her and saw the huge figure of her Jovian maid loom suddenly in the door to the adjoining room.

The woman had been large enough when seen in the open. Here in the small suite she seemed to have the general dimensions of a major asteroid. There was unmistakable meaning in the appraising way in which she glanced first at Barnes, then at the open window in the room.

"On second thought, Miss Starr," Barnes said hastily, "I'm afraid I'll have to be going after all. You'll excuse me?"

"With genuine pleasure."

The door slammed behind Barnes' retreating figure. Amber stared blankly after him for a moment, then turned a frankly dismayed face to the maid.

"Why in the name of the Seven Green Saints of Netpune did I act that way, Tiny?" she demanded. "I had every intention of being friendly with that big ape. Then the minute he entered the door I declared war. What's the matter with me, anyway?"

The Jovian maid's stolid features wrinkled in a tolerant smile.

"Mebbe so you in love with him," she commented. "First ten, eleven husbands I have, I act that way."

CHAPTER XI

Dangerous Trail

VAL BARNES sat in a small anteroom in the Khaldorian War Building for what seemed an interminable time before an aide finally gave him the welcome signal to go on into General Velnor's office.

He entered a big, severely plain room. Huge Martian maps lined the walls. Behind a large, paper littered desk in the center of the room was the burly figure of General Arlohk Velnor, chief of all the armed forces of Khaldor, and second in power only to Prince Pehlor himself.

General Velnor's heavy-jawed face suggested that of a surly, keenly intelligent mastiff. His iron-gray hair was clipped close to his square skull. A livid line from the corner of one eye to his chin marked the path once slashed by a Ganymedean crescent-knife. Smaller scars upon his deeply weathered face were tokens of other campaigns against the barbaric peoples of every frontier land in the System.

He gave Barnes a cordial handshake.

"Glad to see you again, Val. Long time since that little shindig in the Blue Jungle, isn't it? You're after a story, I suppose. I don't believe there's a thing new I can give you. The late afternoon telenews had it all."

"Not quite all," Barnes said. "No telenews has had the real story yet." He walked back to the door to the anteroom. "Mind if I lock this?"

General Velnor's heavy brows arched in surprise.

"Go ahead. Put a couple of land mines there if it'll make you feel any safer. You're surely not jittery about spies here in the heart of the War Department, are you?"

"Frankly, yes. That aide of yours, for example, wears glasses."

"Wears glasses! How many bars did you walk through on your way over here, Val?"

"I'm sober," Barnes said curtly, "though you'll probably find it hard to believe when I get through the little bedtime yarn I'm going to spin you. Listen."

He told Velnor the whole story of everything he had discovered to date. The general listened with frank incredulity at first, then with swiftly sharpening interest. When Barnes had finished, Velnor leaned back in his chair for a long moment of thoughtful silence.

"If I didnt' know you so well, Val," he said slowly, "I'd call the guard and have you put in a strait-jacket. But I do know you, and I know Stellar. And so I am forced to believe that there

must be some real basis for that yarn of yours, utterly fantastic though it sounds."

"Then you'll extend the ultimatum to Lakla for another day or so?" Barnes asked eagerly.

Velnor shook his head. "I wish I could, Val, but it simply can't be done. It took every last ounce of pressure I could bring to bear to get Prince Pehlor to agree to the brief respite we've got. The only way the old boy would stretch it for even half a unit longer would be for you to bring your Brain Spider before him neatly wrapped up in a full and signed confession."

"Go to him and tell him what I've told you," Barnes suggested.

THE general shook his head in the positiveness.

"You don't know our beloved ruler. He used to be a nice benevolent old duck who wouldn't hurt a fly. But since these incidents have been piling up between Khaldor and Lakla he's become a fire-eating wampus cat. He'd have been at war long ago if some of his more level headed advisors hadn't talked him out of it."

"And after all, Val, what have you really got in the way of tangible proof, to tell the the Prince or anyone else? The fact that every man involved in one of the incidents wore glasses doesn't necessarily mean anything except a rather striking coincidence. One Martian in every five wears glasses. As for the shining eyes—well, the only two people who ever actually saw them were a drunken musician and an equally drunken stevedore."

"You're probably right," Barnes agreed reluctantly. "No one in his right mind would be convinced by the few scraps I've got now. And there isn't time to get any more."

"There might be. You still have until mid-sun tomorrow. You might stumble upon something that we could take definite action upon. And if you do, Val, I give you my word that I'll back you to the absolute limit."

Velnor's eyes were somber beneath his bushy brows.

"War is my business, Val, but I'm a soldier, not a butcher of helpless women and children. That's what this sort of a war would be. We can't even protect our own people from slaughter. All we can do is go and wreak similar slaughter upon the cities of our enemy. I don't even dare think what a few weeks of that mad orgy of universal carnage will bring. I'd do anything on Mars to keep it from happening!"

Velnor rose from his chair and put his hand on Barnes' shoulder.

"Maybe you've only got one chance in a million to head this thing off, Val, but don't pass up that one chance. Give it everything you've got. And remember, if you do find anything definite enough that I can possibly take action upon it, I'll back you up with every power and every resource I have!"

That ended the interview. Barnes went down to the street, awakened Merky from his peaceful slumbers on top of the car's heater, and started on the long crosstown trip back to the Stellar Building.

They drove through streets that were in weird and gloomy contrast to the kaleidoscopic flare of color that usually marked a Martian city after dark. Anzoc was sealed in the first blackout in modern Martian history. Opaque blinds yawned darkly in the windows of every building, from tiny residence to sprawling hotel, shutting off every glimpse of the light and life within.

The street lights were dim blue ghosts that were barely visible. The headlights of the little press car, hastily shrouded just before they left the Stellar garage, gave a thin, faint beam that was more hindrance than help in driving. The only real light on the entire landscape was the silver glow from the two Martian moons high in the sky overhead.

BARNES leaned wearily back in his seat as they glided slowly along the shadowed streets. His thoughts were as dark as the night around him.

War!

There had been a time centuries ago when that word had had the power

to make the pulse throb in the veins of red-blooded fighting men. It had brought death and suffering, true, but it had also brought a certain amount of color, chivalry, and romance. There had been a virile glory in the hand-to-hand combat of strong men.

Then man had discovered the secret of flight through the air, and at that instant war had become a Frankenstein monster that reached grisly fingers far beyond its hapless creators and brought wholesale death to men, women, and children alike. There was no romance in the sight of a baby reduced to bloody pulp in its cradle, in shell-blinded children groping through eternal darkness, or in women choking in the lethal agony of gas-seared lungs.

It had been nearly three hundred Terrestrial years since the last great war upon Earth. That gigantic conflict had almost wrecked a planet, but it had at last taught man his lesson.

He had carried that lesson with him when he learned the secret of space travel. For centuries now, war among civilized peoples simply had not existed. Its only lingering traces were the brawls between primitive races in far frontiers, and the occasional punitive expeditions that the advanced races found necessary to preserve law and order in the System.

Tomorrow war in all its old-time horror was due to rise again in lurid resurrection here upon Mars, its ghastly havoc magnified many times by the scientific advances of the centuries since it had last flared. And there was no reason to believe that the lethal contagion would stop with Mars.

Barnes' eyes lifted to where Earth was a vivid green orb in the eastern sky. The methods by which the Brain Spider had brought the Red Planet to the edge of war's flaming abyss would work equally well upon Earth. Or upon Venus. Or upon any other globe in the System. What was tomorrow a war between nations could in a few short months, or years, become a cataclysmic conflict between entire worlds.

The one tiny chance of averting that cosmic catastrophe was to find and expose the unseen power behind the shining-eyed Legion of Death. Barnes shook his head in utter discouragement. As well hunt for one particular pebble among the shimmering billions on Neptune's frozen white-stone beaches!

The only clue to the shining-eyed ones was the fact that they wore glasses. Millions of Martians wore glasses. You couldn't very well take them one by one into a dark corner and knock the lenses from their faces to see if they shielded eyes that shone with greenish fire.

THE press car left the broad boulevard they had been traversing and took a short cut through a narrow side street. A row of Martian purple-apple trees lined the street on each side. Their heavy foliage met in a solid arch overhead, shutting out the moonlight, and making the narrow thoroughfare as dark as a tunnel.

Another car, its lights shrouded like their own, crept toward them. As they came abreast, Barnes saw the dim outline of a driver and a blur of shadowy movement in the rear passenger compartment. Then, just as the car passed on, the vaguely glimpsed passenger turned toward them—and abrupt shock exploded in Barnes' startled brain.

Glowing in the shadowy outline of the face like the baleful orbs of some prowling jungle cat were two eyes of shimmering green fire!

"Turn around and follow that car, Merky!" he snapped.

"Will do," the little Mercurian grunted.

He twisted the wheel violently to the left. There wasn't room enough to turn in the narrow street, but Merky made it—by the exact width of the coat of paint on the car's left side.

They straightened out and shot back along the street. The other car was just turning into the boulevard beyond.

"Take it easy," Barnes warned. "Don't let them know we're on their tail, but don't lose them!"

"You see fire-eyes too, huh?"

"And how! That baby must have gone absent-minded and taken his specs off. Those peepers shone up like a couple of green headlights. He's the lead we've been praying for, dropped right into our laps!"

They swung into the boulevard a half block behind the car ahead. Their quarry was easily identified. The central bulb in its three rear signal lights was bent far out of line, making a figure that was a distinct triangle.

There were few pleasure cars abroad under the hazardous driving conditions. Barnes snapped off their lights to avoid being spotted if the shining-eyed one should happen to look back. They fled silently on through the moonlit night, taking a route that skirted the downtown business district and led through the suburbs to the north.

Barnes' face was tense as he kept his eyes steadily fixed upon the winking rear-lights of the car ahead. It had been incredible luck to blunder squarely upon one of the shining-eyed Legion of Death as they had. If that luck would only hold, the trail might even lead to a means of contacting the figure of lethal mystery whom they knew only as the Brain Spider.

If those in the car ahead noticed that they were being followed, they gave no sign of it. They streaked on through dark suburban streets with a smooth speed that was interrupted only briefly by the occasional dimly winking bulbs of traffic stop signals.

THEY were approaching the northern limits of Anzoc when disaster suddenly struck them. The car ahead flashed across an intersecting boulevard. Before they could follow it there loomed from the shadowed cross-street a train of Army supply trucks speeding toward the Laklan border.

The big gray monsters, gliding silently along on their ladrox tires like ghosts of Earth's ancient tanks, blocked the road as effectively as a stone wall. It was only three time units before the last of them flashed past, but the brief delay was too long.

Barnes groaned as he saw that there was no longer any sight of the distinctive rear-lights of their quarry on the boulevard ahead.

"Looks like our luck's run out!" Barnes grated savagely. "But step on it anyway, Merky. We'll prowl that strip ahead. There's an off chance we might pick them up again."

CHAPTER XII

Spider's Trap

RECKLESSLY Barnes' car hurtled on for a long Martian mile, then braked to an abrupt halt. The road ahead split into two forks. Barnes glared angrily at the widely diverging highways. There was too deadly much at stake to pick the wrong road, but for the life of him he could not see any single hint as to the correct one.

Then from a point some little distance along the left roadway they heard the sound of metal striking upon metal. They swung into that road and glided cautiously forward.

A moment later they again braked to a stop. Dimly visible in the moonlight ahead was a parked car bearing the unmistakable triangle of their quarry's rear-lights. The hood of the car was up. They saw a burly figure working over the motor and heard the metallic ring of a tool in his hands.

Whatever it was that was wrong seemed to be easily fixed. The man slammed the hood back down, got in, and was again off through the moonlit gloom.

"Lucky bust car go hooey, eh, Boss?" Marky chortled as they again glided along in pursuit.

"Too lucky!" Barnes grunted. "Come to think of it, everything about this pick-up has been a little too sticky to be really convincing. We're not trailing somebody, Merky. We're being deliberately enticed, led on, played for a pair of John Q. Saps."

"Head for trap maybe huh?"

"Yeah. Just a couple of innocent dewey-eyed little flies flitting dumbly into the web of the big bad spider."

"Mebbe so like gun?"

"Mebbe so could use," Barnes answered glumly. "I could also use one of General Velnor's land cruisers, but I don't see any around at the moment."

"I got gun," Merky announced. "Plenty gun. Also knife. Also bomb."

The gnarled little Mercurian took one hand from the steering-wheel and proceeded to frisk himself. It was a process that took some little time, for every pocket and fold of his clothing seemed to hold a lethal mechanism of some kind.

When Merky had finally finished, Barnes stared with blank amazement at the young arsenal piled on the seat between them. It included two heavy detonite pistols, one flame-knife with a six-inch blade, one needle-nozzled acid spray, half a dozen detonite grenades, one pocket-size paralysis gun, one somno-gas pistol, and a heaping handful of assorted ammunition for the various pieces.

"What, no battleships?" Barnes demanded.

Merky grinned. "News say war come quick. I get ready."

"You sure did. One look at that pile of armament and a Laklan bombing squadron would be justified in picking you out as a Number One military objective."

Barnes selected the somno-gas gun and one of the detonite pistols, together with several rounds of ammunition for each.

"No want bomb?" Merky asked.

"No, thanks," Barnes said wryly. "You can have 'em. I wouldn't have one of those devilish little eggs on me if it came equipped with a dozen safeties!"

BARNES smiled thinly as he gazed at the speeding car ahead.

"Something tells me that old Fire-Eyes may be in for a very unpleasant surprise," he said. "When he planned this little trap I doubt if he figured on our arriving therein equipped with a heaping dose of spider poison."

They crossed the city limits, flashed on past the last straggling row of darkened houses, and on into the barren reddish wastes of the desert. Far to their left they could see the darkly looming bulk of trees that marked the banks of a feeder canal that brought water to the suburban district they had just left.

Another five time units passed and the road angled sharply toward where the canal trees thickened into a small section of tangled woodland. In the center of the woods there was a flashing glimpse of a tall building of silvery metal. The car ahead entered the shadow of the trees, and the rear-lights vanished around a curve.

They followed until they came to a sign beside the road at the point where it entered the trees. They read the luminous-lettered message:

OFFICIAL WARNING!
End of Public Road
RAY STATION AHEAD
Private Traffic Forbidden

"Trail's end," Barnes commented. "Well, if it is a trap, he picked an ideal place for it. Half an army corps of fire-eyed killers could be hidden out in that young jungle. Swing on in, but take it easy."

They started cautiously along the road into the woods. When they rounded the first curve Barnes signaled Merky to stop. There was no sign of the other car in the winding, darkly shadowed roadway beyond.

"Here's where the infantry takes over," Barnes said curtly. "Swing the bus broadside so the road's blocked."

Merky did as directed. Barnes climbed out, and held up a restraining hand when the little Mercurian started to follow him.

"I'll take a preliminary prowl solo," he said. "You stay here with the car. If anyone tries to get by you, stop 'em. But before you start tossing detonite around be sure your target isn't a guy named Barnes!"

Barnes left the road and started through the woods. Heavy foliage cut off all light from the two moons in the sky overhead. The pulpy tendrils of Martian watervine burst soggily underfoot. Tiny unseen flying things brushed his face with softly scaled wings. Whistling grunts and

the wild scurry of taloned toes over leaves came from the ground at his feet as he blundered into a small colony of slumbering lizard-toads.

Ahead of him the glow of moonlight marked the spot where the trees ended in the clearing surrounding the ray station. He slipped behind a tree trunk at the edge of the clear space and sized things up with wary eyes.

THE solid rectangular bulk of the station itself looked normal enough, with light shining dimly through window slits in its silvery metal walls and the snoring whine of dynamos coming faintly from inside. Containing equipment that trapped cosmic rays, condensed them, and transformed them into electrical energy that was then transmitted into Anzoc's central station, the structure was one of several scores set in isolated locales around the city.

Several yards to Barnes' right the winding road through the woods ended at the front door of the station. The car with the bent rear-light was parked there now, but there was no sign of either the burly driver or the shining-eyed passenger.

Barnes' eyes narrowed. There was something decidedly wrong somewhere. Civilian visitors simply didn't wander into ray stations unchallenged. The operations of the ray mechanisms were almost entirely automatic and required no workmen, but there was always at least one armed guard on duty. In the present condition of imminent war the guard should have been doubled.

Better reconnoiter from the rear first, he decided. With the heavy detonite pistol alertly ready in his hand, he faded back into the shadows and started to circle to his left.

He had completed nearly half the circuit of the building when one of his cautiously groping feet struck something bulky. He stumbled and nearly fell.

He fumbled in his pocket for the light-pencil that all reporters carried. The beam of the tiny light set just back of the pencil's writing point stabbed thinly down through the darkness. Barnes recoiled in horror at the thing outlined in the swiftly moving finger of light.

It was the body of a man. His silver and blue uniform identified him as the station guard. Any further identification was quite impossible. A heavy-caliber detonite slug had literally blasted his head from his shoulders.

There was another body huddled limply on the crushed watervines just beyond. That one apparently had been an extra military guard stationed there for the wartime emergency, for his sprawled figure wore the uniform of a Khaldorian infantryman. Half of his back had been blown out by another heavy detonite bullet.

Both men apparently had been shot down before they'd had any chance to defend themselves. Their detonite pistols had not even been drawn from their holsters.

Barnes snapped the light-pencil off and returned it to his pocket. He resumed his stealthy progress through the trees, but with even more caution

[*Turn Page*]

NO FINER DRINK... *At home or on the go*

than at first. With every groping step he took, his nerves crawled in the iminent dread of having a detonite pellet crash its lethal way into his body.

He reached a spot opposite the rear of the building. There was a door in the silvery metal wall, with a narrow, vine-grown walk leading from it toward the nearby canal. He reached the edge of the clearing and halted for a brief reconnaissance of the moonlit space.

There was no sign of any life there, or within the building. He left the shelter of the trees and started swiftly across the open area. He had taken only a few steps when a sound from the tree shadows behind him abruptly froze him in his tracks.

"Psssst!"

The sibilant call sounded like that of a giant snake. But Martian snakes didn't hiss; they barked. Barnes whirled around, his finger tightening upon the trigger of the detonite pistol.

"Don't shoot, you idiot!"

CHAPTER XIII

The Blast of the Rays

PITCH dark as it was Barnes could not recognize the small, blurred figure advancing through the trees, but there was no possible mistaking the voice. His gun hand dropped. He stared in dumb amazement at the approaching figure of Amber Starr.

As she came out into the moonlight he saw that, for the first time since he had known Cosmic's famous Golden Girl, she was both mussed and soiled. Her usually immaculate coiffure looked like a blond bird's nest that had just gone through a cyclone. There was a smudge of black on the tip of the pertly tilted nose. There was a long tear in the sleeve of her once jaunty sports jacket, revealing the creamy tan skin of a nicely rounded arm.

The famed Blond Bombshell assurance was still there, however. She faced Barnes with her eyes as coolly mocking and her chin as calmly insolent as ever. His first amazement at her presence promptly gave way to exasperation.

"You'll never know how near you came to getting half an ounce of detonite squarely in the center of those pearly teeth!" he grated savagely. "Haven't you any more brains than to call 'Psssst!' to a man with a gun?"

"What would you call to a man with a gun—boo?" she asked reasonably.

"Skip it!" Barnes snapped. "And let's get the heck out of this moonlight before somebody blasts us out of it!"

"We'd have been blasted long before this if anyone had seen us," Amber said calmly. "They're probably looking for us around in front."

Barnes abandoned any further attempt at argument. He grabbed Amber's wrist and started for a clump of shrubbery near the station doorway. She followed him with an unwilling abruptness suggesting a tin can tied to the tail of a rapidly moving hound dog.

Reaching the shelter of the shrubbery, Barnes released Amber's wrist and stared at her with frankly hostile eyes.

"Is there anywhere in the known Universe I can go without finding you in my hair when I get there?" he demanded.

"I didn't come out here to stage a tête-a-tête with you, strange as it may seem," she answered coldly. "Some unknown party sent me a tip at the hotel that one of the Horned Ones had just been seen prowling the woods here. Instead of finding a Horned One, I was greeted by a thick-shouldered thug in a chauffeur's uniform and a heavily cloaked and cowled pal. They tied me up and parked me in a closet in the station."

Amber's lips twisted in a faint smile.

"They did a good job of the tying," she observed, "but they could hardly be expected to know that I did a story recently on Diablo the Saturnian Escape King and he taught me several cute little tricks with knots. They left me then and went somewhere. I got loose and went back to where my

car is parked between here and the entrance to the woods. I found they had been thoughtful enough to remove about half the engine. So I prowled around, watched them come back, and finally you came along. Which brings us up to your part of the story. What was it, my dear Mr. Barnes, that brought you to this cozy little retreat?"

"I was lured here the same as you were, only they went to a little more trouble in my case," Barnes answered. "Somebody has obviously decided to remove both of us, and is going about it the hard way."

"What do you suggest we do next?"

"I'm going into that station and find out what this is all about," Barnes said. "You're going back to where the road enters the woods. You'll find Merky there with a car."

AMBER'S small chin raised skyward in a familiar and stubborn movement.

"I am not going to the car," she said flatly. "I'm going back into the station with you."

"Listen, pest," Barnes said, trying to keep his voice patient. "I'll have enough troubles in there without having to play nursemaid to taffy-headed little girls who ought to be home in bed."

"And what, Mr. Barnes, in your past experience with me ever gave you the idea that I am not capable of taking care of myself?"

Barnes scowled, then shrugged his shoulders.

"I should know better than to argue by this time," he said resignedly. "Compared with you, the mule of our native planet is a sweet and tractable animal. Come ahead. But first you'd better have a little armament."

He reached in his pocket and brought out the somno-gas pistol.

"I'll keep the detonite gun," he said. "You take this gas gat. You know how to use it, I believe."

"You should know," Amber said sweetly. She swung the somno pistol expertly in slim fingers and rose to her feet. "Let's go. The back door is unlocked. That's the way I came out."

They reached the door without incident. Barnes carefully inched it open. They found themselves looking into a long, dimly lighted hallway that apparently ran directly to the central power chamber of the station. They could see the prismatic play of colored light flashes at its far end and hear the whining snore of dynamos and the silken crackling of giant spark-gaps.

They slipped inside and started along the hall. Several doors opened from it on either side, leading into small rooms that apparently were used for storage. All were dark and silent as they passed them in their cautious advance.

They reached the power chamber entrance and came to a momentary halt in the doorway. The room was a huge place, occupying most of the interior of the station. A few neonsten bulbs in the metal girders of the ceiling high overhead gave little more than a gray twilight in which the play of sparks and radiations from the central mechanisms stood out vividly.

Barnes was not scientist enough to understand the detailed workings of the complex array of banked tubes, glowing crystals, spinning generators, and intricately wound coils. But he knew that the entire process of cosmic ray transformation was based upon the peculiar properties exhibited by malzite crystals when subjected to bombardment with certain hard radiations.

The big chamber was deserted as far as they could see from the doorway. Barnes stepped forward into the room, with Amber close beside him.

They had taken only a few steps when disaster struck with cataclysmic suddenness. From the hallway behind them came twin flashes of what looked like pale blue lightning.

A THOUSAND fiery needles shot from the gun in Barnes' hand up his arm. He dropped the weapon as though it were a red-hot coal. He heard Amber's gasp of pain as her somno pistol went spinning from her shocked fingers.

They whirled, and found themselves confronting two men standing

in the doorway. Both were armed with Crayden flashers—squat little black mechanisms with short barrels and flaring funnel-shaped muzzles. Craydens were favorite pieces of equipment with Martian police. The shock of their discharge was ideal for disarming prisoners, and with full power on they could easily kill at close range.

One of the men was a barrel-chested, tough-looking thug with a chauffeur's cap and uniform, apparently the driver of the car that Barnes had followed. The other man no longer wore the cowl and cloak that Amber had mentioned. His weirdly shining eyes identified him as the passenger the chauffeur had driven. He was as tall as Barnes, and far more powerfully built.

"You should have looked more carefully into the little rooms behind the doors you passed," the shining-eyed man said mockingly. "We have been waiting for you in one of them for some little time, ever since we looked out and saw you hiding in the shrubbery."

Anger surged blindly through Barnes' brain at the ridiculous ease with which they had been disarmed and trapped. For a moment he was tempted to risk a wild lunge for the detonite pistol on the floor at his feet, then reluctantly decided against it. At that point-blank range, the full-power blast of a Crayden would be as deadly as being struck by lightning.

Their captors stepped on into the power chamber. It was the first time Barnes had ever seen the eerie phenomenon of the shining eyes at such close range. He heard Amber catch her breath in a short gasp of startled amazement. He didn't blame her. There was something utterly inhuman and starkly alien about the malevolent green fire that glowed deep in those strange orbs. The dim grey light of the room brought it out with eldritch vividness.

The funnel-shaped muzzle of the Crayden in the shining-eyed man's hands lifted until it covered Barnes' face. Instinctively he braced himself for the lethal shock of the expected blast.

"Take care of the girl," the shining-eyed man said gutturally to the chauffeur. "I will cover the man."

The uniformed thug dropped his Crayden into a belt holster and started toward Amber. She tried to spring to one side to dodge him, but the man was too quick. His clutching hands seized her and swept her off her feet. Her attempts to struggle were stifled in an iron grasp that held her helpless. After a brief moment of futile writhing, she suddenly gave a weak moan and went limp.

It was a perfect simulation of a dead faint. She looked tiny and pathetic as she lay inertly in the chauffeur's arms, with her eyes closed. The man quite naturally relaxed the crushing pressure of his grip a bit.

THAT was a fatal mistake. The Blond Bombshell exploded with a violence worthy of her name. One elbow smashed viciously into the chauffeur's solar-plexus. Her other hand, balled into a small hard fist, smashed accurately into his unprotected throat, squarely over the Adam's apple. Both feet lashed savagely out and the sharp toe of one of her shoes caught her captor in the shin with agonizing force.

Before the sorely beset chauffeur realized it, the savagely fighting bundle of blond dynamite in his arms had wrenched herself completely free.

The instant her feet touched the floor she dived for the somno-gas pistol. The chauffeur lurched forward to stop her, but her movements were too lightning fast. He got the full charge of the gun squarely in the face.

There was enough somno in that blast to drop a charging Ionian thunder-bull. The chauffeur's knees buckled. He pitched forward on his face, utterly dead to the world.

It was then that the shining-eyed one abandoned his attitude of tolerant amusement in watching the struggle, and belatedly went into action. The muzzle of the Crayden left Barnes and flicked swiftly toward Amber.

That was the faint opening for

which Barnes had been desperately waiting. He hurtled forward in a headlong flying tackle.

His shoulder smashed solidly into the man's midsection. There was a crackling flash of blue flame so close to his head that it seemed to singe his hair. Then the two of them crashed to the floor.

Both scrambled to their feet at the same instant. Barnes had a brief glimpse of Amber, white-faced, but apparently uninjured by the Crayden's blast. Then he forgot everything else in an effort to meet the blind ferocity of the shining-eyed man's attack.

The Crayden had been knocked from his hands, but the man made no effort to retrieve it, nor did Barnes have time. He found himself fighting an opponent who not only had the savage strength of a giant ape but also seemed utterly impervious to punishment.

He was easy to hit. Barnes sent a lashing rain of blows smashing into his face. But it was like punching a bag of sand. The man never even staggered under the vicious barrage. He bored relentlessly in until he had Barnes crowded against the wall. Then the wide-spread fingers of his hands closed around Barnes' throat in a grip that seemed as unbreakable as iron.

Agony seared Barnes' lungs. Through the blackness swiftly dropping over his eyes he saw Amber dancing frantically around them. She had the detonite pistol in her hand but their struggling bodies were so closely interwined that one of the explosive pellets could all too easily kill both of them.

Barnes felt consciousness slipping from his tortured brain. In a last desperate effort he twisted to one side, then hurled himself backward, taking his adversary with him. They struck the floor in a rolling fall, with Barnes underneath.

WITH his feet in the pit of his adversary's stomach, Barnes straightened his kness in a lunge of savage power. The clutching fingers tore free from his throat. The shining-eyed man's body, driven by the momentum of their fall, plus the terrific thrust of Barnes' legs, hurtled on through the air and crashed headfirst into one of the big switch-panels of the ray mechanism.

There was a flash of searing violet and scarlet flame. The shining-eyed one's body stiffened convulsively as energies of inconceivable power tore through it in rippling sheets of crackling fire. Fuses blew beneath the terrific overload like dully detonating firecrackers. The entire mechanism went suddenly dark and dead.

What was left of the shining-eyed man's body thudded to the floor. The only sound then was the soft whirr of the dying dynamos. The only light came from the scattered ceiling bulbs, hooked to another circuit.

CHAPTER XIV

Joined Forces

LURCHING groggily to his feet, Barnes choked great gasps of air deep into his oxygen-starved lungs.

"Well, that is that," he panted, "and a nice brawl while it lasted!"

Amber managed a rather shaky effort at a smile.

"Aren't you glad I came?" she asked.

"You have your uses," Barnes conceded grudgingly. "But then, so does arsenic."

He knelt for a closer examination of the twisted, seared thing that had been the shining-eyed man's body. From the shoulders down it was a gruesome object of blackened horror. The head and face seemed to have escaped practically unscathed.

Barnes gingerly thrust his hand into the charred cloth of the coat. There was a small bulky object in what had been an inside pocket. He managed to retrieve it at the cost of a couple of scorched fingers, then promptly tossed it away as useless. It had been a small case containing a pair of glasses, but the terrific power of the

ray discharge had reduced it to a fused lump of metal and glass.

Amber walked over and stood looking down at the body.

"Now that I see him without the cowl and cloak," she said, "I recognize him. I don't remember his name, but he's a captain of one of the Anzoc police districts. I thought he wore glasses beneath the cowl, though, and I'm sure his eyes were normal then. What in the name of Saturn's rings ever made them shine that way a few minutes ago?"

"They don't shine now," Barnes said grimly. "As to what made them glow in the first place—well, we'll never get the answer to that now from him. Or won't we?" Excitement suddenly tinged Barnes' voice. "His body's a hopeless mess, but his head doesn't seem to be damaged. For the first time we've got a Brain Spider addict with a skull that is still intact! There's just a chance that it might contain the answers to a lot of things!"

"You didn't bump your own head against something during that fight, did you?" Amber asked suspiciously. "You're talking a most unintelligible brand of gibberish."

"Quiet!" Barnes snapped. "I'm thinking. Don't dare tackle the carving myself. Don't know enough about it. Where could we take him? I've got it! Old Dodo Ramsey's place. If there's anything to find, Dodo will find it."

"If you call that thinking," Amber commented acidly, "it's certainly a weird process."

"No time to draw maps for you now, Goldilocks," Barnes said bruskly. "We've got to hurry up and get this baby out of here before the trouble-shooting squad arrives from Anzoc to repair those shorts."

He stooped, picked up the charred body, and headed for the front door.

"How about the sleeping beauty?" Amber asked, pointing to the chauffeur. "Going to leave him to finish his nap here?"

"No, we can't do that. He's not an addict. His eyes were normal. Still, he might come in handy for questioning. We'll take him along."

HE PLACED the shining-eyed man's body in the rear passenger compartment of the car that was parked at the front door. Then with Amber's help he dragged the chauffeur's slumbering figure out and piled it in alongside the dead man.

They started the car down the road and through the woods. When they rounded the last turn they saw the dark bulk of the press car blocking the road ahead. From behind it there came a peremptory challenge:

"Stop quick or get bust!"

Barnes hastily slammed the brakes on.

"Okay, Merky," he called. "Everything's under control. Clear the road. We're heading for Dodo Ramsey's. You follow us in that bus."

They started back along the desert highway, with Barnes giving the car all the power it would take. Amber waited some little time for further information, but it did not come. Finally she broke the ice herself.

"I'm awfully sorry to trouble you, Mr. Barnes," she said with frigid politeness, "but would it be asking too much if I inquired just where we are going, and what we are going to do when we get there?"

"We're going to Dodo Ramsey's," Barnes answered briefly. "When we get there, we're going to take a long, careful look into the inside of a dead man's skull."

"Maybe I'm a little retarded mentally," Amber said, "but I still don't seem to make a great deal of sense out of what you are saying."

"You'll get the rest of the answers when we get there," Barnes grunted. "Right now I'm trying to wheel this hack along at eighty, using a couple of moons instead of the usual headlights. I can't do it and carry on a brilliant conversation at the same time."

After that they rode in brittle silence. They reached the place where the road forked, then swung the car into the other highway and traveled for twenty time units in a long arc that took them far to the north of

Anzoc. Rock outcrop began to appear in the sandy wastes around them, then low, weathered hills.

Another five units and Barnes turned from the main highway into a narrow rutted road that led straight back into a range of desolate hills.

Amber could keep silent no longer.

"What is this Dodo, anyway?" she demanded. "A hermit?"

"Yeah. He's also one of the most brilliant scientists on Mars. He just happens to hate everything and everybody. I was lucky enough to do him a big favor once, and he's never forgotten it."

They bumped across the rocky bed of a dry wash, rounded a low hill, and found themselves facing a narrow defile between high rock walls. They drove through it into a wide, deep box canyon. Huddled in the shelter of the back wall of the canyon they saw the dully gleaming metal walls of a solidly constructed building.

THERE was a luminous-lettered sign beside the road. It bore inscriptions in Martian, Venusian, Jovian, and seven other major languages of the System. In all ten of the languages the message was the same:

KEEP OUT!

"Sounds like a nice hospitable sort," Amber commented drily.

"That sign isn't kidding," Barnes said. "Dodo really doesn't like people in a large way. He won't even have an assistant or a servant of any kind around the place."

They drove along the canyon road and pulled up in front of the building, with Merky close behind them. Barnes' knuckles thudded with hollow volume on the metal door. For a moment there was no sign of life from within the windowless walls.

"I hope your little pal is still up," Amber said. "He doesn't sound like the sort of a character I would like to risk getting out of bed."

"He's up. Dodo thinks it's sinful sloth to take a cat nap oftener than every fourth day."

The door was flung violently open. Framed in the yellow light from the room behind it was a figure that at first glance looked like something dreamed up by a vindictive artist to scare small children.

The face was a vast expanse of wildly bristling sorrel-colored whiskers in which the only recognizable features were a hooked nose and a pair of ferociously blazing yellowish eyes. The arch of a high and completely bald skull rose in awe-inspiring splendor. The round, barrel-like body was shrouded in a voluminous laboratory smock that had obviously not been washed for years.

"Hi, Dodo," Barnes said cheerily.

The yellowish eyes beneath the bristling sorrel brows glared briefly at Barnes, then softened by the faintest fraction of a degree.

"Oh, so it's you again. The ungracious voice came from somewhere deep within the tangle of whiskers. "What do you want this time?"

"Just a little job of dissection. I want you to take a look inside a skull for me."

Dodo Ramsey's eyes flickered toward Amber's blond head in a brief glance of appraising scrutiny.

"Probably a waste of time," he grunted, "but bring her in."

Barnes heard Amber's sharp gasp of amazed fury. He hastily intervened.

"No, not that one, Dodo!" he explained. "It's a cadaver I've got in the back of the car there."

Ramsey waddled his fat figure over to the car and looked in at the badly charred corpse.

"Looks like he'd tried to kiss a bolt of lightning," he grunted. "That other one another stiff?"

"No, he just has a snoot full of somno. Anyway, you can snap him out of it?"

"Got a ray in there that'll wake him up in ten or fifteen units. Let's get the two of 'em into the lab."

IF "DODO" RAMSEY had any curiosity as to the why and wherefore of a party arriving at his home at mid-dark with a badly charred cadaver and a stolidly snoring somno sleeper, he gave not the faintest sign

of it. He slung the shining-eyed one's blackened corpse over his shoulder with the callous nonchalance of a laborer carring a sack of cement, and led the way back to the laboratory. Barnes and Merky followed with the chauffeur.

"Put 'em down and get out," Ramsey ordered. "Too many ways in here for a snooping greenhorn to blow himself to Phobos, and me along with him. Tell me what you want me to look for in this stiff's cranium. Then go in the front room and wait."

"I haven't the faintest idea what to tell you to look for," Barnes said. "Maybe cerebral degeneration from some new drug; maybe something else. Just take a good long look, and tell me anything unusual you find."

Barnes and Merkey returned to the front room. Ramsey slammed the door on their backs. Amber stared at the closed door with an expression of intense distaste.

"That is one thing I like about being a newswoman," she remarked tartly. "You meet such nice people!"

"Oh, Dodo's all right," Barnes said easily. He brought out a package of cigarets and offered one to Amber.

"No, thanks," she said warily, "I'll stick to my own. They may keep me awake better."

"Taffy-head," Barnes said reproachfully, "you have a memory that would make an elephant seem absent-minded. I haven't the faintest intention of putting you bye-bye again. In fact, I am about to propose an alliance for our mutual advantage and protection."

Amber's finely penciled brows arched in surprise.

"I'm open to argument," she said cautiously.

"There is no argument," Barnes said bluntly. "We've reached a place where we've simply got to work together, whether we like it or not."

"I'm sure I wouldn't like it," Amber admitted candidly. "In fact, I believe I'd just about as soon work with an orang-utan."

Barnes stifled an overwhelming impulse to turn the small blonde over his knee and apply the flat of his hand where it would do the most good.

"Listen, my charming, but slightly dumb friend," he said with weary patience, "did it ever occur to you that someone made a serious effort tonight to kill both of us?"

"I had begun to suspect something of the sort, yes."

"In making that murder attempt," Barnes said, "the shining-eyed bozo and his chauffeur pal were merely tools of a far more important figure somewhere in the background. That unknown central figure is in all probability the Mr. Big who is behind the whole campaign of provocative incidents that is about to end tomorrow with the plunging of half of Mars into war."

"It might not be a single individual," Amber objected. "It might be a group, a tribe, or an entire race."

"Granted. But whoever or whatever it is, you and I have been marked for elimination for one obvious reason—we know too much. We've been working on widely divergent lines. I'd have sworn that there wasn't a single point of reasonable contact in those two lines. Yet the fact that we were *both* lured into that elaborate death trap back there at the ray station indicates that both of us must be on the right track, at least to some extent. Catch?"

AMBER nodded.

"Well, if that is the case," Barnes continued, "it's high time we quit squabbling, both for our own sakes and for the sake of Mars as a whole. We've got to pool our information and our theories and work solidly together from here on in. If we don't, we're each going to get a chest full of floral offerings. And also we're going to throw away whatever faint chance there might still be of cracking this thing in time to head off the greatest catastrophe that ever hit this planet."

Amber's clear eyes were soberly thoughtful as she studied for a moment in silence. Then she smiled.

"You're right, Val," she said contritely. "The thing has become too big for any more bickering between us. I'm sorry I was so chintzy a moment

ago. I'll be glad to work with you. Shake on it?"

There was surprising strength in the slim, tanned hand she gave to Barnes. He relinquished it with some little reluctance.

"You know the general lines I've been working on," she said, "but I'm totally in the dark as to what you've been doing. Suppose you give me your stuff first."

CHAPTER XV

Secret of the Skull

CONCISELY, Barnes gave Amber a resume of everything he had learned to date, from the time when he first heard Ars Kader's cryptic dying message. He told her what he had learned from Johnny Murray, what the stevedore convict had told him, and the results of the many reports from correspondents that had built the clue of the shining eyes into a thing of definite, yet completely mysterious, importance.

"And that's the works," he said in conclusion. "None of it was ever released by Stellar. I don't know how the Brain Spider got hold of it. Maybe there was a tapped visiphone circuit somewhere."

Amber shook her blond head in frank puzzlement.

"There isn't a thing in your entire story, Val," she said, "that seems to be linked with the line I've been working on."

"You mean the long-tailed bogy men?"

"Oh, I don't blame you for laughing at them. I'd laugh at your fire-eyed hop heads too, if I hadn't had such a convincing encounter with one this evening. The Horned Ones are just as real as your men with the glowing eyes. There is absolutely definite proof of their existence."

"What kind of proof?"

"Physical. Strange footprints on wet ground. Strange fingerprints on objects they handled. And there's an inch-long piece of skin that was torn from one of them when an automatic steel door in the Boston Library apparently closed on it one night. Every biologist who has seen that bit of tissue says that it is utterly alien to anything ever known on any of our worlds, even to the chemical constituency of its basic protoplasm."

"I thought the whole thing was just a bunch of susceptible goops having hallucinations," Barnes said. "But I'll admit you can't tear a hunk of epidermis off an hallucination. When and how did these hobgoblins first appear?"

"About two years ago, Terrestrial time. The first reported appearance was in an isolated suburb of Chicapolis. Within the next week there were other cases reported on Mars, on Venus, on Jupiter, and on all the inhabited moons. The things seemed to try to avoid being seen, but people blundered upon them. Their actions seemed to indicate that they were watching and studying things. They prowled libraries, museums, and industrial establishments, always at night when the places were sure to be deserted."

"Did they show any fight when people stumbled upon them?"

"No, they always fled the moment they were sighted. No one ever got a really good look at one, but the vague glimpses they did get were startlingly similar. They all included the same weird characteristics—a dim, monstrous figure of scaly horror, a face fiendishly inhuman and topped by short stubby horns, bestial legs that ended in cloven hoofs, and a long snakelike tail."

"That's an accurate description of the Terrestrial character popularly known as the devil," Barnes commented.

"I know it is," Amber said. "It's also an accurate picture of the ancient Martian Horned Demon and the equally ancient Venusian Tailed One. That has been one of the major unsolved mysteries of the System ever since space travel began—the strange and unexplainable similarity of the central evil figures in the religious legends of the three planets."

BARNES shook his head, deeply puzzled.

"I still don't see why you hook these horned and tailed gentry up with the war campaign on Mars," he objected.

"I'm coming to that. The Horned Ones seem to have spied around the various globes for several weeks. Then suddenly they vanished from all the worlds *except* Mars. If anything, their appearances here have been more frequent since then. The entire horde, or whatever it is, obviously came here and concentrated their efforts on their work on this one planet. They haven't been seen on any of the others since."

"And you figure that that work was the campaign of deliberate war incitement?"

"Yes. The campaign started almost from the very moment that they first returned here. It could have been merely a coincidence, of course, but to me the time element involved was too striking to be explained that way. The more I worked on the story in different parts of the System the more I became convinced that in some strange way there really was a definite connection between the Horned Ones' concentration here and Mars' swift plunge toward war."

"You didn't hint at anything like that in your stories before this morning, did you?" Barnes asked.

"No. The theory was too nebulous, even in my own mind. Then that hermit publicly put into words the very things I'd been trying to work out, and he was promptly and violently killed. The connection there was too pat to be dismissed as mere accident. It was the last bit of proof I needed to release that splash story of mine this morning."

"And tonight," Barnes said, "the unknown powers-that-be promptly marked you for a one-way ride to Death. Looks as though you might have been uncomfortably warm in your yarn this morning, at that."

"But you were marked for that same ride," Amber said, "and there wasn't a horn or a tail in a barrel of your theory."

"I know it," Barnes said. "And there isn't anything in either of our theories to indicate where the Brain Spider might possibly fit into the picture. That's the bozo I was more or less building my entire playhouse around. The deeper we go, the worse we—"

He was abruptly interrupted by the laboratory door being swung violently open. Dodo Ramsey stood in the doorway, his sorrel whiskers bristling in wild disarray and his yellowish eyes blazing. For the first time since Barnes had known him, the eccentric old scientist was genuinely excited.

"Barnes, where in the name of the Great Blue Comet did you get that cadaver?" Ramsey demanded.

"It's a long story," Barnes answered. "I'll tell it to you later. What's the matter—did you find something unusual in the skull?"

"Something unusual!" Ramsey exploded. "Come on in here and look for yourself!"

AMBER and Barnes followed Ramsey into the laboratory, with Merky tagging along behind them. Ramsey peremptorily halted them when they were well inside the doorway.

"That's far enough," he said. "There's too much highly explosive junk you might blunder against out in the middle of the room. You can see well enough from there."

Ramsey crossed the floor to where a wheeled table was drawn up beside a work-bench that ran along one wall. What was left of the shining-eyed one was stretched out on the wheeled table.

The old scientist had obviously done a thorough job of exploration on the skull. He had removed the entire top of it and then hollowed out the interior with the grisly completeness of a Terrestrial youngster excavating a Hallowe'en pumpkin. Barnes and Amber glanced at the gruesomely yawning cavity, then hastily looked away from it and on to the top of the workbench.

They caught their breath in sheer amazement then. There upon the

gleaming black ladroxite bench-top was a thing of silvery beauty, of exquisitely delicate workmanship, and of utterly strange character!

Its central portion was a silver metal disc, about five inches across and half an inch thick. From its outer rim a number of tapering tentacular appendages snaked out for lengths varying from a few inches to over a foot.

The disc itself was a hollow case, with its surface curved as though to fit just inside the top of a human skull. Ramsey had cut away the top of the case, revealing an interior filled with a maze of tiny coils and other mechanism of almost microscopic fineness. In the center of the coils was a little blue globe the size of a small marble.

Ramsey pointed a stubby finger at the thing on the bench. When he spoke there was something closely approaching awe in his voice.

"There," he said, "is a sending and receiving set that is the most marvelously conceived piece of apparatus I have ever seen!"

"You got all of that out of that bird's skull!" Barnes exclaimed.

Ramsey nodded. "That cadaver was nothing but a robot."

"You mean he was a mechanical figure?" Amber asked incredulously.

"No, no!" Ramsey growled impatiently. "He was living flesh and blood. Before that apparatus was inserted in his skull he was probably as normal as anyone. But when once the mechanism was set into his brain he had no more power of volitional movement than a robot plane. He was, to all intents and purposes, merely an 'extension' of the person on the other end of the receiving and transmitting apparatus."

Ramsey pointed to the tentaclelike extensions from the central disc. They were as thick as a man's finger where they left the disc, then tapered and branched into filaments of hairlike fineness.

"THOSE wires," Ramsey said, "were connected with every vital part of the carrier's brain. Some of them ran to the optic and auditory nerves, picking up sight and sound which the mechanism in the disc transmitted to the distant operator. Others were connected with the areas of voluntary muscular movement. They received impulses from the operator and moved corresponding parts of the carrier's body in response."

"But what happened to the higher centers of the carrier's mind?" Barnes asked. "Did he have any consciousness of his own left, to realize what was being done to him?"

Ramsey spread his hands in an eloquent gesture.

"Who knows? If he did have any consciousness it must have been a terrible thing, to be helplessly walled up a prisoner in his own brain, completely powerless even to move a finger of his own volition!"

"What was used to make contact between the carrier and the operator?" Amber asked. "Some new and improved form of radio, I suppose."

"My dear girl," Ramsey said gruffly, "whatever the method was that was used, it was as far superior to radio as radio itself is to the rock-thumping code messages of a Venusian swamp savage. I haven't the faintest idea what the source of power was. Even the basic principles of that unbelievably compact little piece of machinery are different from anything previously known to Science. I can make a reasonably accurate guess as to the general nature of the apparatus, but I haven't the slightest conception of how it works."

Barnes jerked his head toward the body.

"When that bird was alive," he said, "his eyes shone like a couple of glowing green coals. The fire went out when he died, so you didn't see it. Would there be anything about the energy used to operate the brain mechanism that would make the carrier's retinas show luminescence?"

"There might be," Ramsey said. "The rods, cones, and visual purple in the retina are among the strangest and least understood tissues in the human body. It's at least conceivable that they might become luminous un-

der certain radiations."

"And that luminescence," Barnes persisted, "could be shielded by glasses with lenses built for that purpose?"

"Of course!" Ramsey grunted irritably. "To anyone capable of building the brain mechanism the construction of lenses to filter radiant rays would be mere child's play. The thing that still puzzles me is the function of that little blue globe. It has a trigger release of some kind that looks as if it may have been jammed by a stray current of the discharge that originally killed the man."

"A jammed release, eh?" Barnes said. "In that case, I think I know what the blue marble is. If I'm right, it contains an acid so powerful that it would make aqua regia seem like bath-water. That was the stuff that ate away the entire top of Ars Kader's head right before my eyes."

"And the whole thing, Val," Amber said excitedly, "is what Ars Kader and the submarine commander were trying to tell about when they died!"

SHE pointed a finger toward the gleaming thing on the ladroxite slab.

"See what I mean?" she asked. "That central disc and those long sprawling legs—it looks like a great silver spider! That's it—that's the Brain Spider!"

Barnes pursed his lips in a low whistle of amazement.

"By Polaris, lady, I believe you're right!" He turned abruptly to Ramsey. "Got a visiphone around anywhere, Dodo?" he asked. "General Velnor wanted something definite to act upon. If what we've got here isn't definite enough, I'll eat it. I'm going to yank that old boy out here as fast as rockets will carry him. Once he sees that spider thing, there'll be a prompt and healthy extension of that ultimatum!"

"You need not bother with the visiphone!"

The voice, utterly inhuman in its strangely modulated intonation, came from the rear of the laboratory.

"There is no reason to summon General Velnor," it continued. "There will be nothing here for him to see!"

CHAPTER XVI

Voice in the Red Mist

MENACINGLY the voice resounded, as Barnes and Amber whirled to face the place from which it came. The only laboratory light in the rear of the big room was the subdued yellow glow of a ray-lamp under which the chauffeur's figure slumbered on a table top over in one corner. In the heavily shadowed gloom just beyond the ray-lamp's glow there was now a new and startling radiance.

It looked like a pillar of luminous reddish vapor, a little greater in height and thickness than a tall man. There was something inside that eerie pillar of redly glowing mist. It was impossible to make out any definite details of its outline, yet there was something about it that gave an overpowering impression of coldly reptilian menace and abysmal evil.

The detonite pistol was in Barnes' pocket where he had returned it after the battle at the ray station. He unobtrusively let one hand drift down toward the weapon.

The voice from within the reddish mist spoke again:

"Move away from that workbench!"

The curt command was addressed to Dodo Ramsey. The old scientist, apparently half stupefied by the appearance of the eldritch visitant, stumbled obediently to one side.

There was a quality in the eerie timbre of the reptilian voice that sent a dark and nameless dread rippling icily down Barnes' spine. He heard the muffled gasp of Amber's sharply indrawn breath close beside him. Merky's leathery face was as completely expressionless as ever. It took more than a mere snake voice in a pillar of flame to shatter the native composure of a Mercurian.

The instant that Ramsey stepped

out of the way, a tiny finger of intense golden light stabbed from the heart of the redly glowing vapor. The thin ray lanced across the room and struck accurately upon the little blue ball in the spidery mechanism on the work-bench.

There was a click as of a released trigger. The tiny globe shattered like a bursting bubble. From within it a clear yellowish liquid gushed out. As it struck the air the liquid instantly expanded enormously, changing to a seething, bubbling substance that seemed to be half liquid and half gas. Whatever its nature, its corrosive and solvent properties were incredibly powerful.

The central disc and tentacular appendages of the mechanism dissolved in the bubbling mass with the breath-taking quickness of ice crystals melting away in a pool of hot lava. The liquid boiled still more furiously, then became a small cloud of swirling, steamy vapor that swiftly dissipated into the air. There remained nothing but a wide, jagged-edged hole eaten deeply into the ladroxite slab on the spot where the spidery mechanism had once been.

Something seemed to snap in Dodo Ramsey's brain at the wanton destruction of the marvelous bit of mechanical magic that had been the Brain Spider. He suddenly growled in articulate fury and lunged toward a heavy-battery Crayden leaning against the wall near the bench. He never reached it.

THE beam from out the reddish mist changed from gold to vivid green, as though a different energy had been substituted on the same carrier beam. The green ray flashed viciously across Ramsey's waist.

It was like the slash of a great sword of light. Its effect was hideously similar to that of a sword. It cut the old scientist's plump body in two at the waist as cleanly and easily as a hot blade shearing through butter.

Barnes snatched the detonite pistol from his pocket before Ramsey's horribly severed body even struck the floor. Beside him he heard a sharp metallic click as Merky released the safety catch of a detonite grenade.

The green ray of death swerved swiftly toward them. It was a fractional second too late. The pistol in Barnes' hand thudded in a burst that emptied the magazine. Muffled explosions came from deep within the reddish mist as the penetro-detonite pellets streamed accurately home. An instant later, Merky's grenade struck the floor squarely at the base of the pillar of glowing vapor.

There was a mighty sheet of ruddy flame and a crashing explosion that nearly hurled them from their feet. The glowing pillar of mist and everything within a radius of ten feet of it vanished in the devastating power of the grenade's blast.

There was the thud of falling carboys and the crash of shattering glass as shelves and tables throughout the big room gave way and dumped their highly explosive contents. New explosions came as the spilled chemicals began to unite. The detonations were minor at first, then quickly increased in volume. A volley of sharp reports from near the center of the room sent a fiery shower of blazing gouts for a radius of several yards around it, and each gout started a new blaze where it struck.

Barnes grabbed Amber's arm. "Scram for the great outdoors!" he snapped. "This place is jammed with high-powered explosives. Another minute or two and it'll go higher than the Asteroids!"

"But what about the chauffeur?" she gasped.

"He's beyond any help from us," Barnes answered. "The grenade blast got him. Get going!"

The entire interior of the laboratory was an inferno of explosions and furiously spreading flames when they fled through the door into the front room and on out into the open. There was no time even to try to start the cars. They raced on past them, desperately trying to get a safe distance away before the really dangerous chemicals in the laboratory let go.

They were still too near the building when the big blast came. A few

yards behind them the two cars were buried in a gush of flaming debris that spurted through the riven metal walls. The air blast of the terrific explosion hurled them sprawling headlong.

They scrambled up again, dazed but unhurt, and hurriedly put a safer distance between themselves and the building before they turned and looked back. The metal walls made a torn and twisted container for the great mass of leaping flames that was a funeral pyre for four bodies—three of them men, and the fourth the strange being who had spoken from the pillar of glowing vapor. Minor explosions still sounded deep within the seething fire.

"Poor old Dodo!" Barnes said sadly.

AMBER'S piquantly molded face looked taut and drawn in the ruddy glow.

"Val," she half whispered, "did you *see* that Thing in the red vapor?"

"I don't think I actually saw it," Barnes answered slowly, "but I'll swear I felt it—an overwhelming impression of something scaly and snakelike and completely unhuman!"

"That's the way it affected me," Amber said. "It must have been one of the Horned Ones, though it's the first time I ever heard of one appearing in that weird red fog."

"The mist was probably to keep us from getting a clear look at it," Barnes said. "Or it may have been a protective screen of some kind against Crayden and paralysis blasts. Whatever it was, it certainly wasn't proof against detonite."

"How did it get into the laboratory? It seemed to appear out of nothingness."

"Probably burned a hole in the rear wall," Barnes said. "What I'm wondering is how it got here in the first place."

He looked around the rocky waste of the canyon floor.

"Uh-oh!" he said. "That looks like the answer, back there by the canyon entrance."

They hurried to where a small, strange craft rested on the sand. It was unlike any flyer Barnes had ever seen. It looked like a fat cigar of dull leadlike metal resting on a broad base runner. It was too small to have held more than one passenger of anything near human size.

There was a smear of something glittering frosty white in a flange on the side of the broad runner. Barnes wiped a bit of it off and held it up to the light.

"Star moss!" he exclaimed.

"From the Devil Mountains!" Amber said breathlessly.

Barnes nodded. The only place on all Mars that the brittle-leaved white moss had ever been found was on the upper slopes of the Red Planet's one mountain range of any real height, the desolately forbidding Devil Mountains of the northern hemisphere.

"So that's the home port of this flying cigar," Barnes said. "Let's take a look inside."

He reached for what seemed to be a release catch on the closed door in the metal side. The latch clicked in his fingers, but the door did not open. Instead, the metal of the entire craft glowed cherry-red with the suddenness of an electric heating unit being turned on.

They leaped back from the sudden surge of scorching heat. The cherry-red became white-hot incandescence. In a matter of scarcely more than seconds the flyer melted to a shapeless mass of metal, then to fiery molten streams that sank into the smoking and blackened sand.

"No brains, me!" Barnes said disgustedly. "I should have known that flyer would never have been left there without some kind of a protective device. Those scaly babies simply don't take chances on having any of their secrets fall into unfriendly hands."

"And there went our last bit of tangible evidence," Amber said ruefully.

"Yeah. No use going to General Velnor now. All we have is a story that I wouldn't believe myself if somebody else told it to me. We got one thing out of that flyer before it burned, though. We got a mighty good road map."

"You mean we head for the Devil

Mountains, I suppose," Amber said. She looked back at the wrecked cars. "The nearest plane is in Anzoc. It's a long walk!"

"The nearest plane may be a lot nearer than Anzoc," Barnes answered. "Dodo used to keep one in a cliff hangar there beyond the house. Let's take a look-see."

THEY skirted the flaming ruins of the burning building. There was a metal doorway in the cliff safely beyond the range of the explosions and fire. Inside there was a small hangar containing a trim little closed cabin plane. They wheeled it out and got on board. Three time units later they were high above the canyon walls and heading northward with full power streaming from the plane's tail jets.

Amber settled herself comfortably in one of the seats and fished a compact little make-up kit from a pocket of her torn sports jacket. She took one look into the mirror and gasped in horrified dismay.

"How long has that smudge of black been on my nose?" she demanded.

"Ever since I first ran into you back there at the ray station," Barnes answered, "and I wouldn't know how long before that."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"You never asked me."

Barnes grinned in amused amazement as he watched Amber deftly remove the offending smudge and make what few repairs she could to her mussed hair and clothing.

"I give up!" he said resignedly. "Judging from what we already know of the Horned Ones, we are probably literally on our way to the inferno right now. And yet the gal sits there and powders her nose as nonchalantly as though we were going on a Sunday picnic in Wistful Valley!"

Amber unconcernedly shrugged graceful shoulders.

"Why not?" she asked. "If we are going to the inferno I might as well arrive there with a reasonably presentable nose."

Merky huddled miserably down in his seat in a futile effort to escape the chill of the high, thin air.

"We go hot place maybe I get warm," he hazarded glumly.

CHAPTER XVII

The Devil Mountains

ON THEY hurtled, through the cloudless reaches of the upper air. The roar of the rockets was muffled to a purring hum inside the cabin. Far below them the deserts, canals, and sleeping villages of Mars slid silently past.

"A lot more of the pieces of our puzzle have fallen into place now, haven't they?" Amber said musingly.

"Yes," Barnes answered. "We know that the Horned Ones must be behind the whole war campaign. We know the way they've worked it, by acting through their Brain Spider puppets. But we don't know what motive they can possibly have, unless it's merely a blind hatred of the whole human race."

"And we don't know the real nature of the Horned Ones," Amber said. "They can't really be demoniac figures resurrected from devil legends of the System's dark and ancient past, of course. But what else are they?"

"They're not supernatural," Barnes said bluntly. "I'll admit they don't seem to be human in any sense of the word, but they're as definitely material in their way as we are in ours. That gentleman back at Dodo's arrived there in a quite material flying craft. And he got himself blown into equally material pieces by a detonite grenade."

The only major city on their route was the agricultural center of Cereplo. They swung in a wide arc around it to avoid any chance of being spotted by patrol planes. Just beyond it they entered the main desert country. Barnes left the feeder canal he had been using as a guide, and headed straight northwestward across the barren wastelands.

The Devil Mountains were safely within the far-flung national boundaries of Khaldor, so they would not

have the problem of running the strong patrol that guarded every frontier. The sandy barrens below them became rocky, then rose into low foothills, and finally into the lower ranges of the Devil Mountains.

Barnes cut the rocket jets off entirely, to avoid both their sound and the telltale flame of their exhaust, and navigated by the gravity-screen controls alone. They swept in over the main peaks of the Devil range as silently as a Saturnian swan-bat.

"It's like looking for a small needle in a very large haystack," Amber commented wryly, looking down at the vast expanse of tumbled crags beneath them.

"We haven't got so much territory to prowl as you might think," Barnes answered reassuringly. "There aren't over a dozen peaks high enough to have star moss growing on their upper slopes, and they're all concentrated in a central area of about ten miles either way."

"If we had the faintest idea what we're looking for," Amber said, "it might help."

"About all we can look for in the darkness is a light of some sort," Barnes said. "Any hint of a light of any kind down there is pretty sure to be what we're after. I doubt if there's been a human being in the central range for the past twenty years."

THEY dropped to within a thousand feet of the rocky crests and skimmed silently along the range toward the towering cluster of higher peaks at its center. There was a savage beauty in the starkly desolate landscape etched in pale moonlight and inky shadows beneath them.

The area was as drearily barren as Earth's Death Valley or Neptune's Black Ice Jungle, but unlike those districts there was not even mineral wealth in the Devil Mountains to draw hardy prospectors there. The nearest settlement was six hundred Martian miles away, and as far as any visitors to the Devil peaks were concerned it might as well have been six thousand miles.

They reached the central cluster of highest summits and drifted silently in great sweeping circles above them. They searched the bleak stretches of dimly moonlit rock and deep black canyons until their eyes ached, but without seeing the faintest hint of light or life of any kind.

Then they swung in above the spectacular formation that was at the inner heart of the cluster. At some far time back in the dim days when Mars had been a young world, it had apparently been the vast crater of a volcano. It was now a great, deep bowl, ringed in by a rim of towering, mile-high cliffs. On Martian maps it bore the sardonic title of "The Devil's Dimple."

They were squarely over the huge bowl when Amber's fingers dug tensely into Barnes' arm.

"There's a light—there on the eastern rim!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," Barnes grated, "and it's more than just a light!"

"What do you mean?" Amber asked.

"I mean that we're caught. This crate is completely out of control. We're stuck on the end of that light beam as helpless as a fly on a frog's tongue!"

Barnes manipulated the gravity-screen controls desperately, but without any result. He then shot full power to the stern rocket jets. They heard the muffled roar of the jets and felt the plane tremble beneath the terrific power of the blast, but they remained as immovably transfixed at the end of the eerie light beam as before.

Barnes snapped the power off.

"No use," he grunted. "All we can do is wait and see what happens. We're being drawn down now."

They dropped with swiftly increasing acceleration into the great mountain bowl. For one moment of shuddering terror, they thought they were going to be helplessly dashed to pieces upon the bare rock floor. Then a wide section of the rock slid to one side, revealing the blackly yawning mouth of a circular opening.

They plunged accurately down into the center of the opening. They heard the metallic clang of a door closing above them. There was a flashing glimpse of the walls of a vast, softly

lighted rock cavern all around them. Then there was a soft jar as they came to rest upon the floor of the place.

Through the cabin windows they saw a row of flyers ranged along the wall, similar in size but larger than the one they had seen at Dodo Ramsey's. Beyond them was a small group of Martian type planes. One of them looked like the yellow and black Laklan cruiser that had perpetrated the Canal Bowl tragedy.

BARNES drew his detonite pistol. Glancing beside him, he saw that both Amber and Merky were also ready with weapons drawn.

"Take it easy," he warned. "Don't start anything till we try to find out what things are all about. But if we have to start blasting, give 'em the works!"

The darkness came then.

It came with such utter suddenness that for an instant Barnes thought that some unseen hand had abruptly snapped off all the lights in the big cavern. Then he swiftly became aware that the strange phenomenon was more than mere darkness—it was a complete cutting off of all contact with material existence.

He was not unconscious. His brain was alive and keenly awake, but every sense organ was dead, and every power of volitional movement was gone. It was Life-in-Death, a hideous plane of existence where the only tangible thing was the racing turmoil of his own thoughts sealed away in a dark and silent void of stark oblivion!

He had no possible way of even estimating the passage of time. There were periods when he felt that countless eons dragged slowly by. There were other periods when he had the intangible feeling that alien beings did strange things to his body.

Then, as suddenly as they had come, the darkness and paralysis vanished.

He was sitting on a bare stone floor with his back against a smooth rock wall. Amber sat in a similar position on one side of him, Merky on the other.

"Greetings, folks," Barnes said. "I suppose you were with me in the big blackout?"

Amber nodded. Her eyes were still wide with the eerie horror of the experience.

"I was," she said. "If it had lasted just one moment longer, I think I would have gone stark, gibbering crazy!"

They got to their feet and looked around them. They were in a small room some twenty feet square and half that in height. Three of the walls were hollowed from solid rock. The fourth wall was a coruscating sheet of seething scarlet flame.

The Thing in the room with them stood so motionless and was so close to the glare of the fire-wall that they did not see it until it started toward them. Barnes felt the hair at the base of his skull bristle eerily erect as he stared at the approaching Thing in stunned disbelief.

There was no shroud of reddish haze this time to hide the hideous details of the incredible figure. It stood revealed with all the pitiless clarity of something seen in a particularly grisly nightmare.

It was as tall as Barnes, but it looked to be at least twice as heavy. In every physical respect, the creature resembled a fiend from the Pit.

There was a pair of short stubby horns above the malevolently leering face. The eyes were slanted pools of dark menace beneath grotesquely tufted brows. The incisor teeth in the upper jaw were yellowed fangs that dropped an inch below the lower lip.

THE skin was markedly scaly in texture and glittered with a bronze-green sheen. There was no clothing except a wide belt of what looked like flexible metal around the waist. From loops in the belt there hung a number of small tubular objects that might have been either tools or weapons.

The shoulders and torso were as massively powerful as those of a Saturnian wrestler. The hands were human in shape, but the fingers were tipped with long, curving talons. The legs were not human in any respect.

The knees bent *backward;* the legs ended in cloven hoofs. The final and climactic mark of the Beast was the long, slender tail, ending in a tuft of coarse black hair.

Barnes' breath hissed through his teeth in a low whistle of dazed amazement.

"Up jumped the devil!" he exclaimed softly.

"B-but where's the red f-flannel underwear?" Amber quavered. "And the pitchfork?"

There was a note in Amber's shaky voice that told Barnes that even the indomitable pluck of the Blond Bombshell was beginning to crack under the strain. He reached out and gently drew her small, trembling body within the shelter of his arm.

"Steady, baby!" he said reassuringly. "This bird is no more Ole Man Devil than I am. I'll admit he looks like a walking picture of Saturday night in the hot place, but he's mortal enough. Don't forget that one lone detonite grenade scattered that little playmate of his all over Dodo Ramsey's lab."

"So that was what happened to Yurgg," the tailed figure commented. "We had wondered."

CHAPTER XVIII

The Ancient Ones

GRIMLY cold, resonant in pitch, yet indefinably reptilian, the voice that spoke was like the one they had heard in Ramsey's laboratory. Its even inflection was utterly devoid of any trace of human emotion or feeling.

"You killed Yurgg, then, with one of the many weapons we removed from you while you slept under the Black Ray?" the figure asked tonelessly.

"We put half a dozen detonite slugs in him, yes," Barnes said grimly. "Then we gave him a grenade of the same for dessert. He splattered beautifully."

"Too bad," the Tailed One commented. "There are so few of us that we can ill spare even one. But the emergency was too urgent to allow time for safer planning. When the operator warned that the Brain Spider carrier had been killed at the ray station but that the acid mechanism would not release, some one had to go instantly and destroy the Spider. Yurgg at least did that before he died."

"How did he know where we had taken the carrier's body?" Barnes asked.

"He had a detector tuned to the metal of the Spider itself. He was told to bring you back alive, but he apparently had no chance. We are wondering how you guessed that he came from the Devil Mountains."

"There was star moss on the bottom of your boy friend's flyer."

"Very ingenious," the Tailed One said. "There would be a trace of star moss on Yurgg's craft, of course. It was kept in a small hangar on the crater's lip to save the few extra units in a quick take-off. It is fortunate for us that you found it so good a clue. After our workers failed to capture you at the ray station we had almost given up hope of bringing you here alive."

"Why the overwhelming urge for our company?"

"To equip you as carriers of the Brain Spider, of course," the Tailed One said emotionlessly. "In your particular field of work you could be invaluable to us."

"We thought you merely wanted to kill us," Amber said bitterly. "I'll still take death, if you don't mind!"

"You have nothing to say in the matter. Had it been merely a case of eliminating you because you were getting far too accurate in your investigations, you would have been killed at once. But your possibilities as Brain Spider carriers are far too valuable to waste. The two foremost telenews correspondents in the System can be of enormous value to us."

"No catch Head Spider my skull!" Merky protested heatedly.

"Probably not," the Tailed One said. "I imagine you will merely be used for

dissection and study. We are not as familiar yet with the anatomical structure of you of the inner planet as we would like to be." The Tailed One turned back to Amber and Barnes. "As for you two, there will be some slight delay before Spiders can be installed in your skulls. The fact that you are Terrestrials makes it necessary to adjust the mechanisms we have been using upon Martians slightly. In the meantime, I have been sent here to prepare you for the installation."

BARNES' jaw set and his free hand balled into a fist. The Tailed One's taloned fingers drifted to one of the tubular devices in its belt.

"Any attempt at violence will merely result in pain for you," it warned coldly. "You have nothing to fear from the preparatory work I am here to do. It is not physical. It is entirely a mental process, one of education."

"Any cooperation upon our part will be entirely unintentional," Barnes said grimly.

"I need none," the Tailed One answered. "My purpose is merely to relate to you certain facts of history, both ancient and modern, in order that you may partly understand the reason for the rôles that you are to play. We have found that for some obscure psychological reason it is easier for one of our operators to work with a carrier whose brain has been thus prepared. There is less antagonism and bewilderment to overcome. It is rather a long recital. You may seat yourselves again if you wish."

Barnes' arm tightened around Amber's slim figure.

"We'll take it standing," he said tersely.

"Very well," the Tailed One said. "I will begin with a time upon your own planet, Earth, some twenty thousand Terrestrial years ago. Your ancestors lived upon that globe, but they were far different creatures from you. They were shaggy, shambling brutes, very little more advanced in intelligence than your modern apes. The only really intelligent life upon the planet was our race.

"We came there originally from a dim planet that circled a dying sun in a far corner of the Galaxy. When the imminent disintegration of our sun threatened destruction of our planet we left in a vast fleet of space cruisers, seeking another home somewhere in the void. After eons of vain search we stumbled upon your System and found its third planet ideally adapted to our needs. Later a few of us migrated to the second and fourth planets—those you call Venus and Mars—but the great majority of us remained upon Earth.

"There we built our cities upon two small rich continents, one in each of your great oceans. There were not so many of us, possibly thirty thousand in all. We had a certain amount of trouble with the teeming hordes of ape-folk that we found on Earth, Venus, and Mars. But at worst it was no more than a party of modern men would have with the creatures of the jungle if they tried to establish a camp there today.

"Our science was sufficiently advanced to make us undisputed masters of creatures as primitive as the ape-folk. We barred them from our cities easily enough, and allowed them to live their own simple lives in the forests of the three worlds, as long as they did not interfere with our convenience. Their very numbers often made them somewhat of a nuisance, yet we never killed wantonly, except for an occasional hunt for the sheer sake of sport. Our biologists killed them by the thousands, true, but theirs was the same scientific interest that inspires your modern laboratory workers when they slaughter guinea pigs and small apes."

THE cold reptilian voice droned steadily on, as flatly unemotional as though the incredible story it told were merely the dry-as-dust mathematical lecture of a professor in some Terrestrial class-room.

"It was only natural that the ape-folk should come to regard us as supernatural beings. They incorporated us in their primitive religions as both

fiends and gods. They gave us the name of the Ancient Ones, and we finally adopted that name for ourselves. We had already lived in this System for tens of thousands of years when there appeared in the cosmos the catastrophic threat of the Cloud."

The Ancient One paused less than an appreciable unit, then went on: "Our instruments gave us ample warning of the System's inexorable dash toward this vast, dense area of strange cosmic radiation. We were also able to analyze those radiations enough to realize that they offered to our peculiar physical organism the threat of certain and agonizing death.

"Our bodily structures have little in common with yours except in the mere accident of certain external features. Basically, we are the product of another and far different section of the Universe. We can be slain by exterior force, whether it be cosmic ray or detonite or merely the crushing impact of a falling rock, but unless we meet with such traumatic injury we are to all intents and purposes immortal.

"As soon as we learned the grim doom that threatened us with the System's imminent approach to the Cloud, we began making plans to meet it. Flight through space seemed futile. It had taken us eons to find this System. We might wander for countless eons more and never again find one as well adapted to our needs. So we decided to remain.

"We constructed vast, insulated caverns on each of the two small continents on Earth. A third and much smaller one was built here in this Martian crater, merely for the sake of precaution if anything happened to the Terrestrial ones. Those upon Venus were forced to return to Earth because the swampy terrain of the second planet was unsuited to constructing a cavern of the necessary permanence.

"Our entire race retired to these insulated caverns. The two upon Earth must have contained close to fifteen thousand each. The one here upon Mars had a mere handful of fifty. We placed ourselves in a state of suspended animation, with automatic mechanisms set to awaken us at the end of a specified time. Our scientists estimated that the System would pass safely beyond the limits of the Cloud within ten thousand Terrestrial years, but to be safe against possible error we set the awakening mechanism for twice that period.

"It was an excellently conceived plan, but we overlooked two things. One was the possibility of physical disaster. An unforeseen contraction of the Earth's crust sent both our small continent-homes plunging to the ocean bottoms, drowning the thousands who slumbered in the insulated caverns. You still have a faint memory of that great catastrophe today in your legends of the sinking of Atlantis and Mu. The only survivors of our race were those here upon Mars."

FOR another brief breath the Ancient One paused, then went coldly on:

"We who slept here in the Martian cavern awakened some two years ago. We went abroad upon the planet and at once discovered the second fatal respect in which our original plans had gone wrong. The powerful cosmic radiations in the central section of the Cloud had wrought a startling and quite unforeseen transformation in the primitive ape creatures we had known. They were no longer ape-folk; they were now men.

"We flew to Earth, and to Venus, and to the other habitable planets and moons. Everywhere we found the same story. The action of the cosmic radiations upon the genes and chromosomes of the ape-folk had produced mutations so sweeping and so radical that in a relatively few centuries evolution had taken a colossal and incredible leap forward.

"Terrestrials and Venusians were as far advanced mentally as Martians. Even the gnarled little ape-folk of Mercury and the lethargic giants of the outer planets had become human creatures of well developed intelligence.

"We secretly prowled the libraries, the museums, the laboratories and industrial establishments of this new

race of men. We learned the tragic fate that had befallen our brothers of Atlantis and Mu. And we learned that the tiny handful of us who remained faced a tremendous task if we were ever to make this System habitable for our race again. Until we accomplished that task, any return to our former way of life was obviously impossible."

CHAPTER XIX

War's Red Virus

NOW, for the first time, one of the Ancient One's listeners broke in upon his discourse.

"Why should your way of life be so impossible under present conditions?" Amber demanded. "What is to prevent your living in harmony with us? The world's of the System are hardly so crowded that they do not offer sufficient living space for fifty more inhabitants!"

"You cannot possibly know how unbelievably impudent your naïve suggestion seems to us of the Ancient race," the tailed figure said coldly. "It is much as though a herd of your Terrestrial swine had graciously offered to let a man live in a tiny corner of their sty, and enjoy terms of full equality with them. You cannot possibly realize how stupendously great is the gap that still exists between yourselves and a really advanced race such as ours.

"You are not only mere animals intellectually, compared to us. You are not even our kind of animals. Our races are products of two far removed parts of the Universe, hopelessly and forever alien to each other. Your mere presence inspires in me the same instinctive feeling of loathing and repugnance that I know mine does in you.

"Were it not for your advances in science and other phases of civilization the problem would be a simple one. We would simply resume our former place upon the various worlds, and allow you to live your lives as before, undisturbed by us as long as you did not cause us inconvenience.

"But that cannot be done now, even if you agreed to it, which you would not. The mere presence of your civilization makes ours impossible because of the basic differences in our sciences. Your science is based largely upon electricity and combustion. Ours is based upon far different and finer principles that have nothing to do with either. And that science of ours cannot even function satisfactorily on worlds saturated with radio waves, gases, and other noxious phenomena being forever produced by your civilization.

"Your science, while far inferior in power to ours, is strong enough that with your overwhelming superiority in numbers you can easily vanquish us in any open conflict. That leaves the answer to our problem an obvious one. We do not have to destroy the billions of human beings living in the System. We have merely to destroy their recently acquired science and civilization. After that, conditions will again be such that we can resume our former way of life."

The Ancient One's voice was as totally unconcerned as that of a man discussing the necessity for brushing away a bothersome ant-hill. Barnes felt dread crawl coldly along his spine as he began to realize the real nature of the intelligence within the hideous horned head. It was an intelligence far more advanced than that of man in many respects, yet driven by a philosophy of life so starkly alien in its ruthlessly selfish arrogance that it was practically beyond human conception.

"WE COULD not come out into the open in any attempt to destroy your civilization, of course," the Ancient One continued. "We had to find a way to make you accomplish that destruction yourselves while we remained safely hidden. An infallible method was conveniently at hand—the creation and maintenance of total and destructive war among the various human nations and worlds.

"No civilization and no science can possibly survive war carried on with

your modern weapons, provided only that that war is carried on to its final climactic end. The war that begins on Mars today will be such a conflict. We will not allow it to end in a few weeks or months with the surrender of the nations involved. We will see that it continues indefinitely and that it spreads throughout the System.

"With no breathing space for rehabilitation, the conflict will swiftly take its toll of factories, armament works, machinery. All those will be destroyed far faster than they can be replaced. Cities will be razed and not rebuilt. Soon planes and even guns will vanish because there will be no way to make new ones. As decades pass we will still urge men on to battle, though they fight with nothing but the primitive weapons of their ape forefathers.

"All other phases of civilization will pass along with science. Schools, libraries, and museums will be destroyed and not replaced. As generations pass, all knowledge will be handed down by word of mouth alone, and what was once science will soon become the meaningless mumbo-jumbo of tribal medicine men. It will take centuries, true, but to an Ancient a century is no more than a single day to a man.

"When it is finally done, we can then emerge from hiding and again become undisputed masters of a System that is once more adapted to our way of life. The humans who remain will be disorganized tribes living the primitive existence their forefathers lived thousands of years ago. As such, they will be no more real trouble to us than were the ape-folk.

"We can easily take measures to insure that their science and intellectual progress do not again become dangerous to us. In that regained System we can reproduce our kind until we become the great and thriving race we were before the coming of the Cloud."

"No wonder," Amber said bitterly, "that from time immemorial the figure of an Ancient One has been regarded by men as representing the ultimate of all Evil!"

"Yes, such a concept is part of what your psychologists call 'memories of the race'," the Ancient One agreed imperturbably. "It was handed down from the ape-folk who regarded us as supernatural beings. Another similar memory is the prevalence of living sacrifices in the religious rites of many of your primitive tribes as recently as a few centuries ago. That is a dim memory of the thousands of ape-folk slain for scientific purposes by the Ancient Ones."

AGAIN the Ancient One paused, then that implacable, cold voice went on. "But I digress. I am here to give you only the essential facts, and there is but a little more to tell. We selected Mars as the starting point of our war incitement campaign, because in this cavern where we had slept we already had an excellent base from which to work. For carrying out that campaign we developed the device you know as the Brain Spider.

"The number of such devices in use on Mars has varied from time to time as various carriers had to be destroyed. At present there are twenty in active use. The number is necessarily limited, because an Ancient One has to be in constant connection with each carrier, and it is work requiring so great a concentration that even an Ancient cannot do it without regular relief shifts.

"You already know most of the technique involved in the use of the Spiders. The acid capsules are, of course, installed so that in an emergency the whole apparatus can be instantly destroyed. In the isolated stall of each operator there is a switch that releases the acid.

"There are still weaknesses in the Spiders. One is the telltale luminescence induced in the retinas of the carrier's eyes, requiring special lenses to shield them. Another is the fact that when the carrier realizes that death at the operator's hands is only a fraction of a moment away, sheer terror allows his brain to break temporarily free of the operator's control in that final brief instant. That was what allowed those dying warnings of Ars Kader and the submarine commander.

But those are minor weaknesses that we believe will soon be eliminated.

"That is all that I have to tell you. It will be a matter of some two hundred units yet before you are summoned for the installation of the Spiders in your skulls. You may spend that time here as best you see fit."

The Ancient One turned toward the flame-wall, then paused for a final word of warning:

"Do not be misled by the fact that I pass through the flame-barrier without harm. My body is not as yours. The barrier was planned directly for human flesh. It is nearly ten Terrestrial feet in thickness. Any attempt to even leap through it will sear your bodies fatally."

The grotesque tailed and horned figure stepped casually into the coruscating scarlet flame, and was gone.

For a long moment Amber and Barnes stared at the flame-wall in silence.

Then she looked up into his face with a plucky effort at a smile.

"WELL," she said quietly, "at least we know all the answers now."

"Yes," Barnes agreed, "any Terrestrial anthropologist would have given his sabbatical year to have heard that little lecture. It explained the similarity of the devil legends of all the planets, and why the various races of the System are in nearly the same state of evolution in spite of the varying geological ages of their worlds. And it proved that Goldschmidt, the Twentieth Century zoologist, was right when he advanced the theory that evolution wasn't the slow process that Darwin had claimed, but was brought about by mutations of sudden and radical violence. Only trouble was, no one ever knew before what the nature of the motivating change was."

Amber nodded gravely toward the flame-wall.

"And there," she half whispered, "is the answer to our biggest problem now."

Barnes' eyes darkened as he realized her meaning.

"I'm afraid it is," he said soberly. "We are not going to be carriers of the Spider!"

The piquant face that looked up into his was white and drawn, but there was no trace of fear in the clear eyes. There was something about the Blond Bombshell's dead gameness that sent a twinge through the region of Barnes' body where he had always assured himself no heart existed. He drew Amber's slim body close and kissed her with a tenderness that surprised even himself.

Merky, curled comfortably on the floor almost against the flaming wall, grinned appreciatively.

"Two hundred unit long time yet," he said cheerfully. "You neck. I get warm. We both have fun."

BARNES looked at Merky's comfortably curled figure, and his eyes suddenly narrowed.

"Wait a minute, sweet," he said to Amber. "We may not have to stage that tragic and melodramatic third act curtain after all. I think Old-Man-With-the-Tail may have missed a very important trick. When the Ancient Ones made their brief prowl of Mercury they apparently didn't learn the s t a r t l i n g heat-resisting properties possessed by all Mercurians."

He turned to Merky.

"How about it, little one?" he asked. "Is that wall too hot for that leather hide of yours?"

Merky stuck a gnarled hand exploringly into the flaming barrier and promptly drew it out again.

"Plenty hot," he admitted. "Scorch some, no think hurt bad."

"There might be some kind of a switch to turn it off on the other side," Barnes said. "But if you make a dash through it I don't know what you may find. You may run smack into a Devil-Puss, all ready to cut you to pieces with a handful of assorted rays."

Merky shrugged his knotted shoulders unconcernedly.

"Stay here get cut up for sample anyway," he grunted. "Go through wall mebbe fry, mebbe not. Take chance."

He crouched like a runner a short distance from the wall, then shot for-

ward and into it with all the drive he could muster from his short legs. A moment later his call came faintly through the flame-sheet.

"Did do. Catch switch now."

There was a click from unseen mechanism and the flame-wall vanished. Barnes and Amber found themselves looking into a wide, lighted rock corridor. They hurried across the space where the fiery barrier had been.

Merky, with his leathery face beaded by the first perspiration that Barnes had ever seen upon a Mercurian, stopped beating the fire from his smouldering garments long enough to indicate the switch that controlled the barrier.

It was a simple metal lever set in the rock wall.

Barnes threw it back, and again the coruscating radiance barred the little room they had left.

"May keep our hosts from finding out that their company is no longer in the guest-room," Barnes grunted. "With luck, we've got nearly two hundred units yet before they discover we're loose. Come on, let's prowl the joint."

A short distance from the prison-room, the corridor angled sharply to the left. Peering cautiously around the corner, they saw that it stretched for only a short distance before winding curves again barred the view. From somewhere in the distance they heard the soft hum of machinery of some kind.

Just a few yards from where they stood there was the dark mouth of a smaller passage entering the main corridor.

"Strange the place is so deserted," Amber whispered. "You'd think they'd at least have a guard or two here on duty."

"They probably figure there's no need for guards down here," Barnes answered. "They're too short on man power anyway. With twenty Brain Spiders in constant operation, with main operators and relief, that doesn't leave many Ancients out of the original fifty in order to run the rest of the works."

CHAPTER XX

Spider's Message

SLIPPING around the corner, they sprinted for the entrance to the small side tunnel. They found it dark, and tortuously winding. Exploring it for a short distance, they found it was only one of a number of similar tunnels that literally honeycombed the rock.

Using occasional glimpses of the wide, lighted corridor beyond as a guide, they found the side passages so numerous that it was possible to advance parallel with the main passage without having to risk emerging into the light again.

When they reached a point where the hum of the unseen machinery sounded dangerously near, they paused for a moment. Amber ran slim fingers over the rough surface of the rock wall.

"These tunnels were never made by the Ancient Ones," she whispered. "They're as much a part of the natural rock formation as the crater itself."

Barnes nodded. "I imagine the whole lay-out down here is a natural formation that the horned boys merely adapted for their use, main cavern and all. When they came out of their long snooze and equipped this place for a base, they probably just installed lights and did a little work on those parts of it they had immediate use for."

"Mebbe find natural tunnel lead outside," Merky suggested.

"Wouldn't do us any good," Barnes objected. "All we'd do would be to come out in desert country where we couldn't even live without food or water, leave alone getting back to civilization."

Barnes' eyes drifted to where a crevice in the tunnel roof showed gray daylight sifting down from the surface. They had passed a number of such places in their prowling through the maze of dark tunnels.

"The roof of these rock burrows isn't so far below the crater floor,"

Barnes said, "and the roof of the main cavern containing that machinery we hear must be even less. Several accurately placed sticks of triple-weight detonite bombs would probably cave the whole mess in!"

"The bombs are ready and waiting in the racks of General Velnor's battle fleet," Amber said, "if we only had some way to get them here. There's still nearly one hundred and fifty units until mid-sun. I wonder if there'd be any chance of finding that plane of ours and making a break for it?"

Barnes shook his head. "We might be able to find the hangar-cavern, but we wouldn't have a chance in a million of getting away. That attractor beam would pick us out of the air again even if we managed to work the ceiling door and get out of the cavern."

He stopped, thinking hard for a moment. "There's another and far more direct line of communication between here and Anzoc," he said then slowly. "It's one of twenty lines that lead from here to all parts of Mars."

"You mean the Brain Spiders?"

"Yes. Out of the twenty Spider carriers in use now it's a cinch that at least half of them are in Anzoc and other Khaldorian cities. If we could get control of one of them some way, we could get our message directly to Velnor."

"But the Spider operators may be stationed there in the main cavern," Amber objected.

"No, they're not," Barnes said. "Old Devil-Puss specifically mentioned that the operators work in isolated stalls. It seems reasonable to assume that those stalls are parked off somewhere in a side corridor away from the light and noise of the main cavern. If that's the case, we might be able to get at one of the operators individually. We can take a look-see anyway. We'll prowl the district to the left first."

THERE followed a long search through a maze of dark, narrow corridors. Using the sound and occasional glimpses of the light from the main cavern as a guide, they worked in a circular path around it.

They crossed the wide, lighted passage that led on back to the prison-room they had left. Some distance on they crossed another lighted corridor —much shorter and more dimly lighted—that ended in what was apparently a dumping chamber for the skeletons of victims, both human and animal, that had been used for dissection by the Ancients.

Barnes and Amber shuddered and turned away from the heap of grisly white relics, but Merky was more practical. He swiftly searched the pile and selected a heavy thigh bone that had once been part of a Martian desert-buffalo. The knee end had been broken off, leaving a long, jagged-edged point that made the bone a weapon with murderous potentialities.

They were approaching a third lighted corridor when, just before they reached it, there was the sound of cloven hoofs on the rock floor. They shrank back into the shadows of their dark side tunnel. A party of six Ancients passed the tunnel mouth.

The sound of their footsteps faded, then ended. A few short units later, there was once more the sound of hoofs upon rock, and again six Ancients passed the tunnel mouth, returning toward the main cavern this time.

Barnes waited till the sound of their steps had safely died away in the distance, then turned to his companions.

"That wasn't the same half dozen that went the other way a unit or so ago," he said tautly. "Those first ones were fresh, but these last babies looked as if they'd just put in a full day of hard labor. I'll bet ten Terrestrial bucks to an Ionian mustard seed that we've just seen the changing of one of the Spider shifts!"

They cautiously approached the point where the small tunnel opened into the large, lighted passage and peered around the corner. Beginning half a dozen yards to their left, there was a series of six dark, doorlike openings in the opposite wall of the corridor, spaced about ten feet apart. A heavy black cable ran along the roof, and a strand from it led into each of the six openings.

"This is one group of the Spider operators all right," Barnes whispered exultantly. "Let's hope it's the Khaldorian section. Merky, how about borrowing that shin-saber of yours?"

The little Mercurian grinned and handed over the long piece of wickedly pointed bone. Amber leaned down and selected a heavy, jagged piece of rock from the rubble on the tunnel floor. Barnes stared at her blankly.

"Just what do you intend doing with that mountain brick-bat?" he demanded.

"It might come in handy," she answered calmly. "I'm going with you, you know."

"Listen, Tagalong," Barnes said heatedly. "This is one little expedition you are *not* going on! Will you remain here quietly, or will I have to have Merky sit on you?"

THE Blond Bombshell took a long look at Merky and found nothing reassuring in the knotted width of his muscular shoulders. She grimaced wryly.

"All right," she conceded reluctantly. "I'll stay."

Barnes slipped out into the lighted corridor and over to the edge of the nearest doorway. There was no door in the opening and he had a clear view into the interior. It was a small cubicle barely ten Terrestrial feet square. The light was so subdued that it was little more than dusky twilight.

The cable strand from the door ran to a small assemblage of glowing tubes and intricately wound coils set upon a rocky shelf on the far wall. Two thin wires led down from the apparatus to a weirdly designed headpiece worn by an Ancient One who sat in an arm-chair with his back to the doorway.

The central portion of the headpiece was a metal cap held by clamps to the horned skull. It dropped over the forehead to what looked like heavy glasses with opaque lenses, and at the sides into flaps like ear-phones.

Every faculty of the scaly-skinned Ancient was apparently concentrated upon his strange task, to the utter exclusion of anything around him. The only sign of life from the monstrous, dimly looming figure was the faint rhythm as the powerful torso rose and fell in breathing.

Barnes stole on silent feet into the room and to a position directly behind the horned figure. He was near enough that he could have reached out a hand and touched the back of the grotesque head. For a moment he waited, tensely watching in an effort to learn what he could of the method of operating the Spider control.

There was little to see. There were no controls visible on either the tube mechanism or the headpiece. There was a small lever like a knife-switch on the arm of the chair within easy reach of the taloned fingers, and that was all.

Barnes took a step closer. For a long grim moment he studied the demoniacal figure with coldly appraising eyes. He had to strike a vital spot at his first attempt. He knew he would never be given an opportunity for a second.

Any idea of bringing the clubbed end of his bone weapon smashing down upon the skull was out for the simple reason that it would wreck the Spider headpiece beyond hope of repair. The back of the chair shielded the Ancient One's body from the shoulders down.

That left the base of the skull as the only spot offering any real possibilities.

Barnes brought his dagger-pointed piece of bone up in both hands. He breathed a silent prayer that the base of the Ancient's skull was as vulnerable a spot as it was in all System vertebrates. Then he put all his weight behind a lunge that sent the sharp point home with a savage force that drove the bone for half its length inside the hideous skull.

The scaled figure stiffened convulsively, then slumped without a sound. The breathing fluttered and died.

Barnes lifted the sprawled body out of the chair. His skin crawled in revulsion as his hands touched the cold reptilian scales of the bronze-green hide. He spread the clamps on each

side of the headpiece and the entire device came easily free.

He sat in the chair and lifted the headpiece to his own skull. For a moment he hesitated with the involuntary hesitation of a swimmer about to dive into deep, cold water. Then he clamped the device into place.

His senses reeled under the impact of a surging flood of sensations that swept over his brain. It was in some respects like suddenly turning on a teleradio at full volume, only these sensations included far more than mere sight and sound.

He was literally inside someone else's brain, *feeling* every sense and every fiber of that person's body. And, crouched in some far corner of that other brain, was the consciousness of its real owner, helpless, bewildered, severed from all contact with its body.

It took Barnes several moments to analyze the phases of the incredible experience enough to realize its details. The carrier with whom he was in contact was sitting alone in what looked like the dining room of an upper-class Martian home. There was a plate of broiled ankor fowl on the table in front of him, and there was the hot, spicy taste of the bird in his mouth.

The picture was blurred, and Barnes fiddled with the headpiece in an effort to clear it up. The cap itself fitted well enough, the only essential difference between his own head and that of the Ancient One being that he had no horns to protrude through the two openings left for that purpose. The eye-lenses and ear-phones were adjustable for fit. He got them lined up correctly and the scene cleared.

He became aware for the first time that the carrier sat as motionless as a figure suddenly frozen, with a forkful of ankor fowl half-way from the plate to his mouth. Barnes thought of finishing the movement and the broiled meat was promptly carried on to the mouth, chewed, and swallowed.

A few moments of practice after that, and Barnes found that controlling the movements of the carrier was simplicity itself. He had only to *think* the action, and the carrier promptly did it. But every movement of every voluntary muscle in the carrier's body had to originate in the operator's brain. While in contact with the carrier, the operator had actually to live the carrier's life for it.

Barnes' first concern was to find out in what part of Mars his carrier was located. He brought it up from the chair and over to a window. The first look outside sent relief surging through Barnes. Luck was with him so far. The locale was the city of Anzoc!

The next thing was to find out the carrier's personal identity. There was a mirror on the opposite wall of the room. He walked the carrier over in front of it. There was no mistaking the grossly corpulent, bespectacled, moon-faced figure reflected there.

His carrier was Ralso Geddar, long-time political power in Anzoc, present advisor to the Prince, and noted for his markedly jingoistic tendencies of recent months. Barnes realized now where those jingoistic ideas had come from.

Barnes walked the carrier out of the room, down through the hall, and out the front door. There was a long, sleekly luxurious car parked there, with a waiting chauffeur.

He thought the words that made the carrier say:

"The War Department—and hurry!"

CHAPTER XXI

Stark Death

THE War Building was a seething beehive of activity, but Ralso Geddar had enough political prestige to be passed readily through to the anteroom of General Velnor's office. There Barnes ran into the first snag.

The aide on duty looked at the carrier with frankly hostile eyes. Barnes remembered then that Ralso Geddar's jingoistic activities had made him far from popular with those who would have to do the fighting he so passion-

ately advocated.

"General Velnor is in a staff conference and cannot possibly be disturbed," the aide said curtly.

Barnes took a wild shot in the dark. "Tell General Velnor," he had the carrier say, "that I have an urgent message for him from Val X. Barnes."

The aide's manner instantly changed to tense interest.

"That's different," he said quickly. "Go into the general's office, please. I will notify him at once."

Velnor came in almost immediately. The lines etched deep in the old warrior's scarred face gave eloquent witness of a night without sleep. His greeting barely hid the dislike he had always felt toward Ralso Geddar. Then, apparently struck by a sudden thought, Velnor shifted his gaze to the heavy-lensed glasses that Geddar wore, and the unfriendliness became open suspicion.

"Take it easy, General," Barnes spoke through the carrier. "You're looking at Ralso Geddar's body and listening to Ralso Geddar's voice, but the man really doing the talking is Val X. Barnes. And I am talking to you from the hidden headquarters of the creatures who are responsible for the entire campaign of war incitement upon Mars. No time for questions now. Listen to what I have to say."

He gave Velnor a swift, terse summary of all that had happened since he left him the previous evening.

"And that's the line-up, General," he finished. "You've got the whole gang of Ancients packed here in one place, ready to be wiped out forever by a single bombing attack. And with their passing, the entire war cloud over Mars will vanish like a bursting bubble!"

"But Val, or Geddar, or whatever I should call you—" Velnor began.

"Call me Val," the carrier broke in, "and think of me as Val. It simplifies things."

"All right then, Val. Surely these Ancient Ones of yours have their hide-out strongly defended, if they have the scientific knowledge you say."

"It's defended, yes, but I don't think those defenses will be proof against a surprise bombing attack made in real force. The whole works is right beneath the floor of the crater. A ton or two of detonite will crumple everything, if you can only get it home. Don't come in by land. They've got a look-out on the crater lip. Come in from at least a hundred miles out in space. Your biggest danger is that some Brain Spider carrier in your own forces will tip off your plans long before you arrive."

"Little danger of that," Velnor said. "After what you told me about the shining-eyed ones last night, I picked a small, powerful fleet of cruisers with special personnel, just in case. There isn't a man on them who wears glasses."

"Good. All you've got to do then is come on up and give 'em the works. We'll try to get outside the crater before you get here. If we don't, that's just too bad. Don't stop even to think about us. Dive in out of space and unload detonite till the entire crater caves in!"

VELNOR'S face was haggard with uncertainty.

"Val," he said slowly, "I wish I could believe what I'm hearing. If it's true, it offers a miraculous chance to save uncounted thousands of innocent lives and possibly even the civilization of a planet. But if it's a trap of some kind, my falling into it would mean a terrific blow to Khaldor's air strength at the crucial moment when every plane counts. I haven't any tangible proof that you're really speaking to me through a Brain Spider in this man's skull. I don't even know that there's a Spider in his skull."

Barnes snatched the glasses from the carrier's face.

"Turn the lights low," he ordered.

Velnor dimmed them briefly, then turned them back up again.

"Yes," he said, "the eyes blaze weirdly without the glasses. But Val, if you were in my place would you stake your country's safety upon the mere fact that a man's eyes shine strangely in the dark? I want to believe you, but I don't quite dare. If

you could only give me some stronger proof!"

"You're sure that indisputable proof of the existence of a Brain Spider in this man's skull will be enough to convince you?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Surgical dissection would reveal it, of course, but there's no time for that. I've told you of the acid release device. I'm pulling the lever now. You're going to see Ralso Geddar die before your eyes. And the way in which he dies will, I'm sure, remove your last lingering doubt!"

Barnes' fingers fumbled for the small lever on the arm of the chair. It was the only control of any kind within reach; it *had* to be the acid release device. He clicked it shut.

THE sight of the office interior vanished in a flash of dazzling white flame. The ear-phones roared in chaotic tumult.

Then there was nothing but darkness and silence.

Barnes reached up and wearily removed the headpiece. He felt as thoroughly spent as though the arduous task of directing the carrier had taken hours instead of only units. For a moment he sank back in his chair with his eyes closed, fighting off the surge of sick horror that that last brief moment of terrible climactic tragedy had brought.

Ralso Geddar's death had been stark necessity. The real Geddar had died long ago, anyway, when the Brain Spider was first placed in his skull. But even then it was a thing of horror to be forced to deliberately take the life of a man, and it was still more horrible when the frantic terror and dread of the victim's last conscious moment flashed vividly through your own brain.

Barnes opened his eyes, then blinked in startled surprise. The limp body of the Ancient One was still sprawled inertly on the floor at his feet.

Crouching close beside it was the small figure of Amber Starr, with a jagged rock poised alertly ready over the hideous head.

"What are you doing—holding a wake?" Barnes whispered. "That bozo's been dead for twenty units."

"He looked dead," Amber admitted, "but I thought I'd better stand guard, just in case."

Barnes took the headpiece and clamped it back on the Ancient One's skull. If the body were discovered, the Ancient Ones would realize that their captives were loose, but they would not know that one of them had been in close contact with a Spider carrier.

They reconnoitered the corridor and found it deserted. A swift dash across the lighted passage took them deep into the shadows of the tunnel they had recently left. There was no sign of Merky anywhere. Barnes turned to Amber.

"What did you do with him?" he demanded. "Conked him with that boulder, I suppose, and parked him over in a corner somewhere."

"I did not!" she retorted heatedly. "He left to see if he could find some way that might lead to the outside. So I went over to see how you were getting along. How did you do? Get your message through all right?"

Before Barnes could answer, there was a cautious hail from Merky far down the tunnel.

They joined him.

"Fine watch-dog you are, little one!" Barnes said scathingly. "Taffy-head managed to get there just about as quick as I did."

Merky glared at the Blond Bombshell indignantly.

"She promise me she stay put!" he protested.

"Sorry, Merky, but when I made that promise I had my fingers crossed," Amber said sweetly. "It's an old Terrestrial custom."

"Skip it," Barnes said brusquely. "Find any sign of a way that might lead out?"

"Mebbe so. Find place old stream run. Mebbe run on out some place."

"Let's go," Barnes said. "If General Velnor does what I hope and think he will, it won't be long before these catacombs are going to be very unhealthy."

CHAPTER XXII

Tomb of the Ancients

AS they followed Merky back along the winding tunnel, Barnes gave them a brief resume of what he had done with the carrier of the Brain Spider. Then as they worked their way deeper into the darkness both he and Amber found themselves too busy keeping up with the little Mercurian to waste any strength on conversation.

They were far beyond the range of the lighted corridors now. The only illumination of any kind was the occasional faint smear of grey where daylight seeped in from crevices above. They slid down a steep slope and came out in what seemed to be the smoothly worn bed of some subterranean stream that had drained the crater far back in the distant past where there had been rains in this part of Mars.

It led swiftly downward. As it passed beneath the lip of the crater and under the main bulk of the peak, all light vanished. Barnes and Amber groped their way through darkness so thick it could almost be felt. Had it not been for Merky, they would have been held to a snail's crawling pace. But the little Mercurian, like all of his race, had a batlike ability to sense his way in any darkness.

They stumbled along behind him on the tortuously winding downward path for what seemed endless hours. Barnes was just beginning to wonder dazedly if they were traveling lengthwise under the entire mountain range when they glimpsed daylight far ahead.

Another hundred Terrestrial yards and they emerged into a narrow canyon. It was not until they rounded a bend and the high walls flattened to sloping rocky banks that they saw where they were. The bulk of the crater peak loomed massive and sheer above them. They were in a stony wilderness of bleak wasteland just beyond its base.

They halted in the shade of a tall rock pinnacle to allow their eyes to become accustomed to the bright blaze of the sun high in the cloudless sky overhead.

Barnes glanced at the watch-button on his sleeve.

"Seventy-three units since I talked to Velnor," he said. "If the old boy's coming, he's due about any time now. Those Khaldorian battle-wagons are supposed to be the fastest things in the System."

"If they do come," Amber said, "I'm wondering if they'll prove a match for those horned demons. They must have the crater guarded with every device known to their science. And from what we saw of it, that Ancient science isn't exactly feeble!"

"I doubt if the place is so strongly guarded," Barnes said. "There'd be little point in it. After all, once they're discovered, all the defense weapons in the world couldn't save them from being overcome by sheer numbers. Old Devil-Puss said that they were placing all their reliance on merely remaining safely hidden for the next century or so."

"There come bomb-planes!" Merky exclaimed. "Right out of sun!"

AMBER and Barnes looked up. There was a small black speck just beyond the sun's disc. The speck became a smudge, then expanded to a small cloud. It hurtled on down with inconceivable speed until it was visible as thousands of tiny robot planes, each one so packed with detonite that it was little more than a power-driven bomb.

Either the Ancients were late in detecting the menace flashing toward them out of the fiery glare of the sun, or their weapons were designed for close range defense only. The first of the rocketing robot planes were within a few thousand feet of the crater's floor when pale beams lanced skyward.

Every plane those beams touched exploded. The firmament seemed a solid mass of rippling flame and crashing detonations. The beams thrust with the fluid swiftness and accuracy of giant rapiers, but there were too

few Ancients to hope to get every robot-bomb.

One of the hurtling planes rocketed on through the beam barrage and crashed its deadly cargo on the crater floor. Another followed, and another. One of the beams flickered and died. A new and heavier swarm of robot planes came screaming down from the battle fleet still too high in the ash-blue sky even to be visible.

The beams stabbed frantically, but planes rocketed through in swiftly increasing numbers. The ground rocked now beneath the almost continuous roar of detonite crashing into the crater floor. Beams flickered ever more frequently into oblivion. There was a cataclysmic crash as a three-ton detonite carrier struck squarely. The last of the beams vanished.

Then the main fleet—thirty sleek, powerfully armed cruisers—came hurtling down to finish the job. Barnes and his two companions crouched back in the shelter of a rocky niche while for thirty catastrophic units the peak thudded and trembled beneath a withering blast whose starkly destructive power would have crumbled an Asteroid.

When a lull finally came in the deafening bombardment, they stumbled out of their shelter and waved their arms in signal to the nearest of the cruisers hovering overhead. . . .

The sun was well down the western sky when Barnes and Amber finally switched off the visiphones in the communications cabin that General Velnor had assigned to their use in the giant flag-ship of the Khaldorian fleet. During the hours that had passed they had sent in the thousand and one amazing details that combined to make up what was the greatest telenews story in the history of the System.

News in turn had drifted in to them in flashes from the distant city-rooms in Anzoc—flashes that told of the wild joy of a planet snatched at the last moment from the dizzy abyss of war's catastrophic holocaust. Men had died on Mars today, but they were men who bore in their skulls the silver tentacles of the Ancient's Brain Spiders.

When the crashing bombs of Khaldor's fleet destroyed the strange power plants of the crater, twenty carriers of the Spider slumped in hideous death as acid was released that ate away brain tissue and skull alike in steaming vapor. Whether the acid release switches were thrown by the dying operators or automatically released with the wrecking of the transmission mechanism would never be known.

SOME of those who died were high in the armed forces of Khaldor and Lakla; others were government officials, police executives, and journalists. The most startling victim of all was bespectacled, wizened little Prince Pehlor, ruler of Khaldor.

Amber and Barnes rose from their chairs and crossed to one of the view ports. They looked down at the scene below the hovering cruiser, where the battle craft of Lakla and half a dozen other Martian nations now were with those of Khaldor.

The peak that had once been the highest in the Devil Mountains was a vast crumbled mound of debris, into which the swarms of battle cruisers still poured lightning bolts, paralysis rays, and respiratory poison gases of every kind known to Martian science. If any trace of life still remained deep beneath that shattered heap of rocky rubble, the heavy gases that seeped downward through every crevice would soon destroy it.

From a hidden cavern in those bleak rocks, the evil race of Ancient Ones had risen once in unholy resurrection, but there would be no resurrection this time. The cavern was now a giant tomb.

The menace of the Ancient Ones was forever ended.

"Trail's end, Mister," Amber said softly. "And I suppose it also means the end of our very successful collaboration?"

Barnes looked down quizzically at the slim little figure beside him. She looked as though she would fit nicely into the crook of his arm. He tried it, and found that she did. Her lips looked as though they would be nice

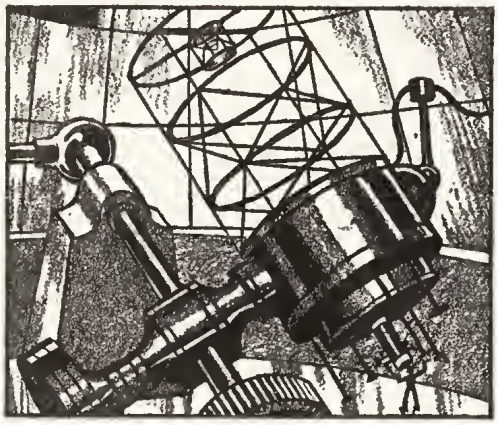
to kiss again. He tried that also, and found that they were indeed.

Some little time later, Barnes turned to where Merky was reposing in blissful and steaming contentment upon the top of the cabin's heat-unit.

"Congratulate us, little one," he said. "The taffy-head and I have decided to make our collaboration both permanent and matrimonial."

Merky grinned.

"Serve you both right," he grunted.



Coming in the Next Issue: CITY OF GLASS, *an Amazing Complete Book-Length Novel by* NOEL LOOMIS— *Plus Many Other Stories and Features!*

•

Alla-Beg's eyes grew round as the creature emerged from the shadows of its cage

ALLA-BEG'S GENII

By RICHARD O. LEWIS

Alla-Beg, the Crooked Magician, Plays Abracadabra with the Wrong Dimension

ALLA-BEG wanted to get the job over with as quickly as possible. No one could hear the man's cries here in the basement laboratory, but those cries of accusation were unnerving Alla-Beg.

He had thrown his black cloak over the doctor's head and arms. That was to keep the doctor from staring at him. He worked hurriedly now, drawing the cord tighter about the black cloak and the incumbent figure upon the floor.

But the black cloak did not shut off the cries of Dr. Herbert Gathy; it merely muffled them.

"Alla-Beg!" came the voice. "I was once your partner! Have you forgotten? Are you mad? Why do you do this to—"

Alla-Beg—that was the stage-name of the man who flaunted to the world that he was a master magician—could stand the cries no longer. Clutching up a metal bar that had fallen to the floor, he struck the cloaked figure with it. The cries stopped.

The silent figure was limp as Alla-Beg dragged it across the floor and propped it upright in a chair. On either side of that chair was a bank of tiny power-tubes.

Only a few moments before Dr. Herbert Gathy had been demonstrating the unique properties of those banks of tubes to Alla-Beg, his former partner in vaudeville back in the old days.

Alla-Beg, scheduled to open with a small road-show in a neighboring town, had called at Dr. Gathy's home for the same old reason as before—to borrow money. But when he had seen Dr. Gathy's demonstration of the tubes, he forgot all about borrowing money.

He forgot all about everything except that, here in this lonely basement laboratory where no one would know, was a strange machine that, once he had it in his possession, would bring him a fortune and once again put his name into bright lights as a master magician.

He had leaped suddenly at Dr. Gathy, had thrown his black cloak over the man's head and had dragged him to the floor.

Now he went to the controls and did exactly what he had seen Dr. Gathy do only a few moments before. He closed the switch.

Dr. Gathy's slumped figure was on the chair directly between the two banks of tubes. There was not a sound in the dimly lighted basement laboratory as the power surged through those tubes.

One moment, Dr. Gathy's body was there; the next moment, it had vanished.

Alla-Beg shut off the power and sank down into a chair near the table. Cold perspiration oozed from his narrow, swarthy forehead.

Dr. Gathy was gone.

As Alla-Beg wiped at his perspiring face, he wondered if he had been too hasty. After all, he didn't know too much about the power of those tubes. Gathy had explained it to him hurriedly—something about the tubes making a change in the atoms caught between them, causing their rate of vibration to increase to a point beyond that of ultra-violet light.

Perhaps he should have waited until he found out more about the principle of the thing . . .

Alla-Beg's eyes went to the banks of tubes, and again the light of greed glowed in them, the light of greed that had caused him to dispose of the man who had once been his partner.

"There is great magic in them!" he breathed finally. "A type of magic never before shown upon any stage! Soon I, the great Alla-Beg, shall be the greatest magician the world has ever seen!"

THE Merriwell Tent Stock Company opened in a small town in Central Iowa. The Merriwell Players went through their comedy-drama as billed while candy butchers went through the audience selling their "prize in every package" sweets.

Immediately after the performance, Jake Merriwell, comedian and owner of the show, stepped to the stage out of character.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "We have another treat in store for you. We are fortunate in having with us the world famous Alla-Beg, the greatest magician of all time. Alla-Beg will mystify and baffle you with thirty minutes of occult science and necromancy never before seen upon any stage. One thin dime will permit you to stay and see the entire performance of the great Alla-Beg!"

The band struck up a lively tune, and ticket-sellers rushed out into the audience.

Five minutes later, the lights were dimmed, the curtain went slowly up and the small group of people settled themselves in the reserved-seat section to watch the great Alla-Beg who had stepped out upon the stage.

Two tables with black drapes that reached the floor were in the center of the platform. The tall, dark man in the black cloak went from table to ta-

ble, going through his long-practiced tricks one after the other.

After twenty minutes of it, he paused to face the audience, his beady eyes shifting and glinting in the dim glow of light.

"And now, my friends," he said in faked Hindu accents, "there comes the feat of magic that only I, the great Alla-Beg, am allowed by the Masters of Darkness to perform."

HE WENT quickly to a small cage at one side of the platform and flung open the door. A hushed chuckle rose from the audience as a fat duck came from the cage and waddled clumsily across the floor in the wake of the man of mystery.

But the chuckle lapsed into deep silence as the band went into a mysterioso mood and all the lights in the tent blinked out to leave the stage lighted only by the pale blue of the foots.

Alla-Beg placed a small pedestal between the draped tables. The duck climbed upon this and sat there moving its head slowly from side to side.

Taking five measured paces from the creature, Alla-Beg located the switch hidden beneath the carpet and placed the toe of one shoe lightly upon it in readiness. Then he took a pistol from beneath his cloak and held it pointed upward. The music stopped.

For a full moment Alla-Beg stood there, his lips moving and one hand making gestures as if to evoke the aid of unseen beings. Then, with eyes closed, he raised the gun higher and fired. At the same time, his toe came down hard upon the hidden switch.

A gasp of amazement went up from the crowd as the people saw the duck vanish into thin air from the pedestal almost simultaneously with the flash of the gun.

A moment later Alla-Beg fired the gun and pressed the switch again. The duck reappeared almost instantly, shook its head a few times as if the experience were distasteful to it and went waddling back to its cage.

Next, the man of mystery placed a huge, silver ball on the pedestal between the tables. The ball was a relic from the day when Alla-Beg had once posed as a crystal-gazer and mind-reader. His thin lips smirked in self-satisfaction as he set the thing to rights, and his distorted image in the mirrorlike ball leered back at him.

Once again the gasp of amazement came from the audience as the ball vanished at the crash of Alla-Beg's pistol.

Alla-Beg smiled to himself. This was simple. He could go on amazing people like this day after day. And no one would ever know.

He pressed the switch for the ball's return. But something had gone wrong. He sensed the fact immediately by the crowd's reaction. A murmur had risen, a murmur of sheer incredulity.

Alla-Beg wheeled quickly to look at the space between the two tables. The crystall ball was not there. *But something else was!*

A gasp escaped his own tight lips as he saw the thing. It was a living animal. There was no doubt of that. But it was like no other animal Alla-Beg had ever seen.

The thing was like a blob of hairless putty. Its head was bulbous and hideously misshapen, its nose a mere button between two slitted eyes. Its torso was bloated and sagging, its hind legs thick and flabby—as if all the weight of the thing had settled to its lower extremities. Over all, it was not more than a foot and a half high as it sat there upon the flat pedestal between the tables.

The uproarious applause from the crowd beyond the footlights drove itself into Alla-Beg's brain and brought back his stage-presence. They thought this a part of the show! They thought the whole thing was a deliberate trick!

Alla-Beg faced them then with a low, sweeping bow and signaled for the curtain.

ALONE in his tent that night, Alla-Beg sat staring at the strange creature he had placed in a cage. For the first time since he had disposed of Dr. Gathy in the basement laboratory, he was afraid.

He was certain now that some other world lay beyond his own, some other world that the banks of tubes had con-

tact with. But what kind of world was it? He wished he had given Dr. Gathy more time to explain.

Were there dangerous creatures in this other world? If so, what would prevent one of them from coming through some night on the stage?

Perspiration began oozing from his body as a terrible reality drove itself home to him. *There were creatures of intelligence in this other world! One of them had moved the heavy glass crystal out of the influence of the tubes and sent back this little monstrosity!*

He remembered now the experiments he had made with the tubes before opening with the show. Several times he had made rabbits disappear, and reappear. But there had been a few times when he had not been able to make *some* of those rabbits come back into reality. Had they merely leaped out of the sphere of influence? Or had something *taken* them out?

Alla-Beg got quickly from his chair and started toward the trunk in one corner of the tent. There was a loaded pistol in that trunk. From now on, he would carry it on stage and off.

Half-way to the trunk, he stopped. His eyes had caught sight of something lying upon the bottom of the small cage that housed the ungainly animal. He stooped down, scraped the thing out and held it up in his fingers.

It was a round, glasslike stone no larger than the eraser from a small pencil. He went hurriedly to the light and began turning the thing over and over in his trembling fingers. He tried in vain to scratch the surface of the thing with the point of his penknife. But the steel became dulled against it.

"A diamond!" he gasped finally. "An uncut diamond! The creature must have had it in one of its paws!"

He went quickly to the cage again. But there were no more diamonds.

And then Alla-Beg's eyes grew round, and the blood left his face as the creature came crawling out of the shadows of its cage.

The thing was no longer sagging and puttylike in appearance. It had undergone a remarkable change during the few minutes since he had last noticed it. Its body had become more definite in shape. The nose that had once been a button had developed into the rudiments of a snout.

And the body was much larger. Or did it merely seem that way because of the hair that was sprouting thickly upon it?

Alla-Beg experienecd a moment when he thought he was losing control of his senses. But reaction came quickly. He broke open the cage, grasped the animal by the back of the neck and killed it between the banks of tubes that lay hidden in the draped tables. Then he pressed the switch.

An instant later the thing was gone —back into wherever world it had come from. And it would not return again!

THE rest of the week in that Iowa town was hectic for Alla-Beg. He never knew quite what to expect when he started that part of his act which utilized the mystery of the hidden Gathy tubes.

Sometimes, the things he placed between the tables would disappear and reappear again as if by magic. At other times, the objects would disappear and other-world objects would reappear in their places—square stones, mounds of earth, parts of trees and strangely hued flowers.

But no more puttylike animals came through.

At the end of the week, the Merriwell Show moved to a new town a hundred miles farther to the west.

Alla-Beg's fame had preceded him. Hundreds of people flocked to the show to see the man's display of black science.

But the crowds were disappointed. For three night, Alla-Beg made ducks, rabbits and inanimate objects disappear and reappear. Never once did a startling thing such as the appearance of an unearthly flower or shrub take place.

"He does it with mirrors," members of the audience told each other. "He's a fake. Creatures and objects from another world! Who can believe stuff like that?"

But Alla-Beg had an idea, an ace in the hole. For more than a week, he had been practicing an act with a small Shetland pony, had been teaching that pony to sit still for several minutes at a time at a given command. Twice he had made that pony disappear and reappear again in the privacy of his own tent.

And now he was ready for his audience. He would prove to them once and for all that there was no system of mirrors used!

When he stepped out on the stage that fourth night in the new town, he had no fear to mar the glorious future that lay before him. He was again in his own element, thrilling to the sight of the tense, white faces that floated beyond the foots, reveling in his strength to mystify them.

His white, jeweled turban contrasted sharply with the black cloak about his shoulders. He had stained his swarthy face a shade darker and had blackened his small moustache so as to accentuate the flashing white of his teeth.

"A few more weeks of this," he thought as he went through his opening tricks, "and I'll be ready for the big time. No more weekly jumps from town to town. I'll have money and fame."

He went from one trick to another, weaving his spell over the audience as the act progressed, shaping them for the climax he had had in store for them.

"And now, my friends," he said finally in exaggerated Hindu, "I bring to you the greatest feat known to the mystic arts. It is much beyond the rope trick and the basket trick of ancient India. And it is only I, Alla-Beg, direct descendant of the Prophet, who is granted leave by Brahma to perform the miracle you are about to see."

STILL weaving his spell, he released the duck from its cage and made it vanish and appear again between the two tables. A rabbit and a white dove were treated in a like manner, and he acknowledged the scattered applause with swooping, formal bows.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said with a dramatic flash of teeth, "I now present to you the Miracle of Ancient India!"

Tom-toms set a tempo in the band, and the music went Oriental in mood. The lights dimmed, leaving only the pale blue of the foots to flood the stage. A hush fell over the audience. From the wings came a girl in flimsy Hindu attire. She was leading a spotted, Shetland pony.

Alla-Beg placed a large, flat pedestal between the satin-draped tables. The pony climbed upon it. A flick of the whip in Alla-Beg's hand caused the pony to sink down to a sitting position. The pony had been trained to remain in that position until such time as there would be another flick of the whip.

The usual gasp went up from the crowd as the pony vanished a short time later, seemingly into thin air.

Alla-Beg went over to the pedestal. He stood upon it and took a bow. He walked back and forth between the tables through the same space the pony had occupied but a moment before, proving to the crowd, beyond shadow of doubt, that no mirrors could have been used.

As he walked slowly and dramatically back from the pedestal, the applause was deafening. He smiled inwardly as he bowed again and again in acknowledgement. His success was assured.

Then he raised his whip, sent it crackling through the air and, at the same time, pressed the switch with the toe of his shoe.

He realized almost instantly that something had gone wrong. He sensed it as the applause broke off abruptly into silence. He knew it by the way the floating, white faces out there had turned whiter, by the way the necks craned.

His hand darted to the gun he carried beneath his cloak as he wheeled about to meet whatever menace he might find there upon the pedestal. Then he stood there paralized, frozen into immobility.

The girl who had brought the pony came hurrying out on the stage at the sound of the whip. She stopped

short as she caught sight of the thing that squatted there between the two tables. Her face went pasty beneath its make-up. A short sigh escaped her parted lips as she crumpled into a limp heap upon the floor.

Alla-Beg hardly dared believe his eyes. There, squatted upon the pedestal, was the most unearthly thing he had ever seen.

The creature was no larger than a man, and was built along similar lines. But there all human resemblance ceased.

THE beast was thick through the hips and legs, and its paunch was distorted and bloated—as if all its weight had fallen to its lower regions. The slim arms that grew from the narrow shoulders ended in huge, beefy paws. Its head was bald and conical, its eyes were slits. The ears protruded from either side of the narrow head and pointed upward, and the nose was but a tiny button in the middle of the sagging face.

It was sitting there tossing three round objects into the air and catching them awkwardly—as if in mimicry of a juggler.

Sudden roars of laughter broke out in the audience as the exasperating creature let one of the objects slip from its clumsy fingers and roll to the floor.

The buttonlike nose wrinkled and the wide mouth split into a cherubic grin, as if in silent mimicry of the crowd.

Alla-Beg forced the cold terror from his body. His foot found the switch and pressed it. The thing vanished instantly into nothingness.

The people laughed. They cheered. They shouted and whistled, wanting an encore. The curtain came down with a bang in answer to Alla-Beg's frantic signal.

Several of the players came rushing out upon the stage. Two of them picked up the girl who had fainted and carried her off. The others began asking excited questions.

Alla-Beg fumbled the pistol from beneath his cloak.

"Get back out of here," he hissed at them, his trembling hand waving them back with the weapon. "I've told you never to come out upon this stage when my things are here!"

The Merriwell players backed away. There was something about this man of magic that filled them with awe. Even Jake Merriwell, the owner, wondered at times whether or not this dark-visaged mystery-man was in some way in league with the Devil, or whether or not he might actually be the old boy in person.

"And stay back!" Alla-Beg warned. Even now, the guarding of the secret power of the tubes was uppermost in his mind.

Leveling the gun at the spot between the two tables, he pressed the switch once more with his foot. But the creature did not reappear. In its place, much the same as it had been a few moments before, was the Shetland pony.

ALONE in his tent that night Alla-Beg sat in thoughtful silence, the food before him untouched. In his hand was the round object the apish creature had let slip from clumsy fingers to the stage floor.

He let it roll over and over beneath the glow of the light upon the table, his fingers toying speculatively with its smooth surface.

"Another uncut diamond," he said softly. Greed glowed in his eyes. "Last week, the small creature brought me one. And, tonight, this new monstrosity brings me another. There must be many of them on the—on the other side of the barrier. . . ."

His mind drifted away in warm, meditative reverie. "Uncut diamonds! If I could get that creature to come back again, and if I could only get it to understand what I wanted."

His beady eyes sparkled avidly. "It would be like Aladdin's genii!" he thought. "All I would have to do would be to 'rub the lamp' and the thing would appear to do my bidding!"

There was standing-room only in the tent the following night. News of Alla-Beg's strange monster had spread rapidly through the town.

"It's as big as a mountain," some had said.

And from others, "It's the funniest thing you *ever* saw!"

Thunderous applause greeted the magician as the curtain went up on his act.

Alla-Beg bowed low to his audience. At the same time, certain misgivings bit deep within him. He knew why that crowd was out there. They had come to see the monster. But what would happen if the creature failed to return?

Secretly, Alla-Beg almost hoped that brute would not put in its appearance. But what about the disappointment to the crowd? They would boo him, perhaps even demand back their money. And, again, if there were the diamonds. . . .

He went through his act hurriedly and automatically.

The pony was brought to the stage and, as upon the previous night, Alla-Beg made the animal disappear—seemingly with the crack of his whip.

He faced the audience, acknowledged the applause and then, with another crack of the whip, pressed the switch with his foot.

He knew from the reaction of the crowd before he turned from them, what he would find. The creature would be there again.

IT was. Sitting there with the same silly grin on its broad face, the fantastic beast was tossing three round stones into the air and catching them again with awkward hands.

Alla-Beg's breath caught in his throat at the size of one of those stones. It was nearly as large as a hen's egg! A fortune in one stone!

He began walking cautiously toward the creature, conscious of the gun within easy reach beneath his cloak.

The monstrosity paid little enough attention as Alla-Beg neared him. But when the magician picked up a ripe banana from one of the tables, peeled it partially and offered it to the apparition, the creature became instantly attentive. One hand clutched the banana quickly, and the wide mouth split open in a grin that threatened to destroy the sagging face.

Alla-Beg waited expectantly. Would his little plan work? The creature had a gift of mimicry. Would it—

The beast reacted beautifully. It placed one of the diamonds — the smallest one—upon the table as if in payment for the delicacy.

Alla-Beg backed slowly away. And as the crowd roared with laughter at the beast who had shoved the whole banana, skin and all, into its great mouth, the magician pressed the switch that desolved the thing into nothingness.

In spite of the extra diamond, Alla-Beg was not happy that night in his tent. There were too many things bothering him.

The show would be in this town only one more night. Then it would move on westward over a hundred miles to Omaha. Naturally, the creature of the other world would not move to the new location. It would have no way of knowing where the show had gone to.

Alla-Beg remembered the huge uncut diamond the thing had brought upon the stage that night, and his eyes narrowed. He wanted that diamond. That one stone alone was worth a fortune!

But there was only one more night left in the town. He had to get the stone that night. But what if the creature didn't even appear?

He considered quitting the show and staying on in the small town. He might be able to contact the genii often. He might, in time, amass the greatest fortune in diamonds the world had ever known.

But if he stayed in town, there would be questions asked. People would wonder why a great magician would quit a show to tie himself down in a mid-western village. They would ask questions, pry into his private affairs.

Alla-Beg made up his mind suddenly. He would get that huge diamond the creature had been toying with upon the stage! He would get it tonight! *Now!*

He brought the pony in quickly and made sure that all the tent-flaps were secure against any chance prying eyes.

Two minutes later he pressed the switch and saw the pony vanish from

the pedestal between the two banks of tubes. Placing his hand upon the gun in his belt, he waited two more minutes. Then he pressed the switch again.

THE thing appeared almost instantly. Although Alla-Beg was prepared for the apparition, he could not help but feel a slight tinge of fear as the hideous creature materialized before him. He and the creature were all alone in the tent.

But he forgot his fear as his eyes caught sight of the largest of the three stones the thing again held in its hands. It was undoubtedly the same stone the creature had toyed with upon the stage. It would rank among the largest diamonds of the world!

Taking the gun from his belt, Alla-Beg approached the mountain of sagging flesh. He was taking no chances. And yet he felt sure that the thing would not charge him. The thing was too heavy and clumsy, and there was that silly grin upon its face.

Three bananas lay upon the table where Alla-Beg had placed them. Taking one of them up in his left hand, he extended it to the monstrosity.

The thing clutched it greedily, opened its wide mouth and shoved the fruit in without bothering to remove the skin. Then its eyes caught sight of the other two bananas upon the table. Unintelligible grunts came from its crammed mouth as it got awkwardly to its feet and made for the remaining fruit.

It jammed the bananas into its mouth one after the other, stopping only long enough to place two small diamonds upon the table. The other diamond, the large one, lay upon the pedestal, unheeded where it had fallen.

Alla-Beg swore softly beneath his breath as the thing turned to face him expectantly, as if hoping for more bananas.

Impatient anger was rising within the magician. He raised his gun slowly and centered it upon the sagging chest before him. Why not? He could get it over with in a minute or two, clutch up the diamonds and hide them before anyone came rushing in to learn the cause of the shots.

"I could declare that the brute attacked me," he muttered, "and that I was forced to shoot it in self-protection."

But he dismissed the thought almost as quickly as it had come into his head. The shooting would attract too much attention. There would be too many questions asked. They might pry into his past life, learn about Dr. Gathy and the tubes.

"All right," he said aloud. "Wait there. I'll see if I can find you something else to eat."

A plan was forming in his brain as he backed slowly away toward the make-shift table behind him. There was a bowl of apples there. If he could toss one of those beyond the tubes, get the creature interested in going after it—

"Here you are," he said, and gave one of the apples a high toss in the general direction of the sagging monstrosity.

Thin arms and beefy hands rose quickly into the air. But the clumsy fingers did not succeed in making the catch.

ALLA-BEG smiled as the apple fell and rolled across the floor to one side of the tent. Holding his gun alertly, he began sidling toward the pedestal and the diamond almost before the beast had started in pursuit of the apple.

When within three feet of the diamond, the magician made a dash for it. His fingers closed over it, its silky smoothness thrilling him.

For a brief instant he forgot the beast. Here was a fortune in his very hands! Now he could quit the show, go away somewhere into seclusion! He would be a wealthy man! And he would have plenty of time to make contact again with the other world and to harvest the untold wealth that must be there! It would all be his for the ask—

Alla-Beg never finished his sentence. A great sickness shot suddenly into the pit of his stomach. He had caught sight of the beast out of the corner of his eye. And the crea-

ture was standing over the switch upon the floor! The monstrosity's foot was *coming down upon the switch!*

An inarticulate cry escaped Alla-Beg's pale lips as he jerked the gun upward.

But he knew he was too late. He was trapped between the tubes.

Even before his finger could close upon the trigger of the weapon, he felt a strange slither of needles and pins that tore lightninglike through his trembling body.

The crash of the gun rang through his brain. But he knew that he had not hit the monstrosity. For the beast was not there. Neither was the tent. All had vanished into a pale nothingness!

Alla-Beg possessed an insane desire to scream. But the sound did not come from his constricted throat. He felt that he had gone mad as his terror-stricken eyes beheld the nightmare that had appeared about him.

The transformation had been almost instantaneous. One moment there had been the tubes, the tables, the tent, the monster. And now—a great, blue sun hung high in the grey sky and sent a pale blue, burning light down over the rocks and crags and gnarled, multi-colored vegetation. The gurgle of a small, pink stream over jumbled rocks was the only sound to break the silence.

Alla-Beg wheeled quickly about, half-expecting, half-hoping to find the tent behind him. But it was not there. There was only the bleak, weird landscape that stretched on and on toward the dim, broken hills in the distance.

He was standing on a slab of gray rock. At his feet was the diamond that had fallen from his nerveless fingers. And scattered about the rock were more diamonds, large and small.

But Alla-Beg did not pick them up. The feeling of sickness had gnawed deeper into his stomach and his head was reeling in madness.

FIFTY yards away, the Shetland pony was walking slowly over the rocks, browsing upon the straggling vegetation that grew from the crevices.

Alla-Beg started toward the pony. He didn't know why. Probably because it was the only familiar object around him.

A dozen paces on he stopped as another familiar object met his eyes. It was the crystal ball. And beside the ball lay a black cloak, the black cloak he had thrown over Dr. Gathy's head and shoulders back in the basement laboratory!

Something was struggling to make sense in Alla-Beg's plodding brain. The blow upon the head back in the laboratory could not have killed Dr. Gathy. Had it done so, the black cloak could never have got here.

He glanced quickly about, half-expecting the doctor to step from behind one of the rocks.

Then his eyes lighted upon the pony again, and a gasp escaped his lips. The pony had undergone a remarkable change. The hair was thinner, the paunch was bloated and sagging, and the animal's weight seemed to have sunken lower into its thick legs.

And then Alla-Beg understood. The monstrosity! The monstrosity that had closed the switch in the tent had been Dr. Gathy! Dr. Gathy had maneuvered him into his own trap.

And that small creature that had appeared a week ago, the hairless, puttylike blob, had been one of the rabbits Alla-Beg had been practicing with. Dr. Gathy had found that rabbit, had waited for an opportunity and had sent it back to see whether or not the rabbit, once in its natural environment, would change back into a rabbit again.

It had. Alla-Beg remembered how the hair had been sprouting on the thing when he killed it between the tubes.

There was a small card lying upon the black cloak. Alla-Beg picked it up. It was the route-card of the Merriwell Show, giving the names of the towns and the dates they would be played.

He had not removed that card from his black cloak before throwing that garment over Dr. Gathy's head. So Dr. Gathy had used that card to follow the general route of the show.

Something was scrawled upon the back of the card. It read:

I could not attack you when I appeared upon the stage. You were armed. You would have killed me instantly.

I waited, knowing full well that your greed for the diamonds would trick you sooner or later. There are millions of diamonds all about you now. I hope you will enjoy picking them up. There is little else to do in this uninhabited world.

Herbert Gathy.

P. S.—By the time you have finished reading this, my natural physical structure will have been returned to me. A glance into your crystal ball will show you your own future.

Alla-Beg caught sight of his image in the mirrorlike ball. It seemed that all his weight had shifted slowly downward into a bloated paunch. His head was bald and conical, his eyes mere slits. His ears protruded from either side of his narrow head and pointed upward, and his nose was but a tiny button. . . .

•

Read Our Companion Magazines

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

and

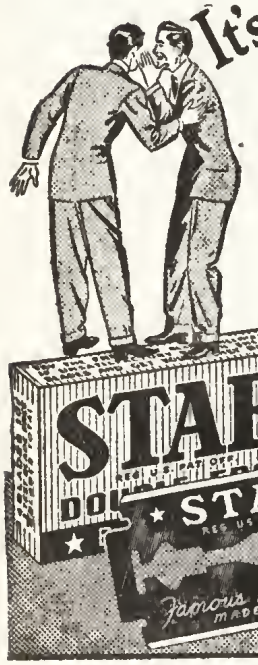
CAPTAIN FUTURE

Each 15c *at All Stands*

•

It's a secret! 6NX!

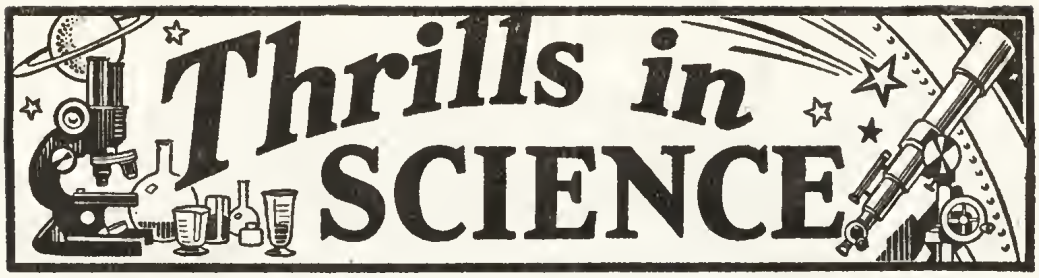
REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.



6NX is our new secret formula applied to the new Star Double Edge Blade—a combination of steel structure, hardening, tempering, grinding, honing and stropping which has produced the most remarkable double edge blade ever made. Buy a pack today!
Star Division, American Safety Razor Corp., Brooklyn, N. Y.

INTRODUCTORY OFFER
5 for 10¢ 15 for 25¢

STAR DOUBLE EDGE BLADES
FOR DOUBLE EDGE RAZORS!



Thumbnail Sketches of Great Men and Achievements

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

PAINLESS DENTIST

THE young wife came running out of the flagstone walk as she heard her husband's despairing cry of "Nig! Poor Nig!"

She reached the garden in time to find the tall figure of her husband leading the stupefied figure of their pet dog around in an attempt to revive him.

"Oh, Tom!" she cried. "What is it?"

"It's all right now, Lizzie," said Dr. Morton, smiling a bit. "It was that new, pure sulphuric ether I made and tried on Nig. It worked so well at putting him to sleep, for a moment I feared I had killed him."

Mrs. Morton made a helpless gesture with her hands. That new pain killer her Tom was always seeking. Every hour he could steal away from his dental practice he spent in his laboratory. His clothes constantly reeked of ether. He had even given up his medical career within a few months of his degree to pursue this dream of alleviating the suffering of mankind.

But this time Dr. T. W. G. Morton had found the answer. He had said so. But would it work on people? Was it really a pain deadener? Was it harmless?

Nobody knew. And nobody would submit to the experiment, even though Dr. Morton and his two assistants offered to extract an offending tooth free of charge and give five dollars to the patient who would take the new gas fumes which had to be inhaled.

In despair, Dr. Morton at last tried the gas on himself one night in his office. He was blissfully unconscious for nearly half an hour. When they heard of his experiment, his wife and his assistants were highly alarmed. But Dr. Morton was a courageous man of his convictions. The stuff was better than nitrous oxide. And it hadn't hurt his dog, Niger, had it?

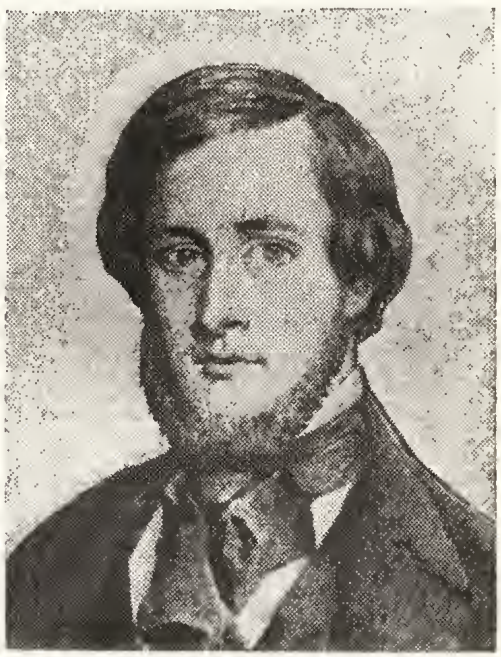
Nevertheless, no one came forward to submit to a dental operation while under the new pain killer, and Dr. Morton's assistants offered to submit. But it was folly to try the stuff on a person who felt no pain.

And then, just as they despaired of a voluntary human subject, the night bell of the dental office rang, and Dr. Morton admitted a man who had a badly swollen jaw all bandaged up.

"Dr. Morton," groaned the patient, "I have a bad tooth to be pulled, but my mouth is so sore I don't believe I can open it."

This was manna from the gods. Quickly the doctor asked if the patient would try his new pain killer. The man nodded eagerly.

In a trice the two assistants prepared a



Dr. Thomas Morton

cone of the new sulphuric ether and, under Morton's direction, administered it. A few breaths, and the patient was asleep. Quickly Dr. Morton selected forceps and located the abscessed molar. As quickly he extracted it. The patient didn't even move. He slept on.

Almost in panic they used cold water to arouse him. In a few moments the man sat up and blinked his eyes.

"Are you ready now to have the tooth removed?" asked Dr. Morton.

"Indeed, yes," said the patient. "The pain is easier already."

"It is over," informed the doctor with a laugh, indicating the tooth on the floor. "Your bad tooth is out."

Thus was the first operation under anesthetic ether performed in a dental chair.

After persistent efforts Dr. Morton finally prevailed on Dr. J. C. Warren to test his discovery in a public operation in the Massachuetts General Hospital on October 16, 1846. After staying up nearly all night perfecting a breathing cone, Dr. Morton personally administered the ether to the patient.

In a few minutes he announced to the surgeon, while all the spectators, doctors and scientists in the operating theatre listened and watched breathlessly:

"Dr. Warren, your patient is ready."

The operative field on the abdomen was exposed. It was an operation for the removal of a particularly painful tumor. Dr. Warren glanced at the calm face of his sleeping patient and at the pale features of his anesthetist. Then he compressed his lips and called for the proper scalpel.

He made a stroke down the skin. Blood flowed. The spectators were already flinching from the expected screams and writhings of the patient. But the subject slept calmly on. Rapidly the surgeon proceeded with the operation, removing the tumor, suturing blood vessels, cleaning up, sewing the outer skin. Then, as the nurses and assistants attended to the surgical dressings, Dr. Warren removed his gloves and raised his face to speak to the intent circle of watchers.

"Gentlemen," he said almost in awe, "this is no humbug!"

And Dr. T. W. G. Morton had added another gift of mercy to the many discoveries piling up for the benefit of mankind. To the honor of medicine, he was later given an honorary degree as an M.D., a title he richly deserved. It was Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes who proposed the name "anaesthesia" from the Greek meaning, not feeling." And Dr. Morton took his niche in the hall of man's benefactors.*

*Editor's note: Dr. Crawford W. Long performed the first operation under ether in 1842, as subsequently revealed in 1849, but it was Morton's independent discovery and demonstrations which first made the value of sulphuric ether known to the medical world.

BONEYARD DETECTIVE

THE trustees and curators of the British Museum were all aflutter and and adither. The Museum had received a mysterious package that was carefully crated and highly insured. When it was opened, the package proved to contain just one item—a single bone. Not an ordinary looking bone at all, for it was a slender thing some thirty-four inches long.

But the unusual thing about this tidbit for a gigantic fido was the fact that it was unrecognizable. It came from no known species of animal. In spite of all the bones and specimens that these learned men had pawed over for years, they could not identify it.

"Send for Mr. Owen," said one, at length. "This is very important. The superIntendent should know about this strange specimen."

"Yes, indeed," agreed another curator. "Superintendent Owen will like to sink his imagination in this, but this is one time even he will be fooled. Let's see what he says."

So Richard Owen, superintendent of the natural history department of the Museum since 1856, was apprized of the acquisition of this new and unclassified relic of Mother Nature which had come all the way from New Zealand. Richard, one of the foremost naturalists of his day, and destined to receive the K.C.B. in recognition of his worth in 1884, came and saw this single piece of bone. He scratched his head, figuratively and literally, as he studied the specimen.

"What do you make of it, sir?" asked a young assistant conservator.

Everybody hung upon the great man's words. For Richard Owen was already famous for his papers on comparative anatomy and his researches on the remains of extinct animals. His first notable publication, *Memoir on the Pearly Nautilus*, 1832, had already become a classic. Before his death he was to make important contributions to every department of comparative anatomy and zoology for a period of over fifty years.

Thus, it was no wonder that these stumped scholars awaited his comment on this yardstick of bone with bated breath. But Sir Richard disappointed them.

After careful consideration he said:

"This specimen of skeletal framework is from a heretofore unknown species. I cannot tell you now what I think. I must study and measure and examine this fragment. Give me a week, gentlemen, and I will tell you what I think."

Ah, even the profound Richard Owen was stumped with this specimen. With knowing winks and nods the great man's confreres and subordinates agreed.

A week later they assembled to hear the superintendent confess his bewilderment. To their utter amazement and sheer disbelief they listened to him say:

"Gentlemen, this is the left leg bone of a giant, extinct bird. Unfortunately, no man has ever seen one of these creatures alive, and not a single fragment of bone other than this piece here has ever been found. We have no way of knowing whether any further specimens will come to light. However, I have reconstructed an approximate skeleton of this bird, and here is a rough drawing to show you what it probably looked like."

And Sir Richard Owen displayed the measurements and the picture of the huge extinct bird of the land Down Under which

has since been named the New Zealand Dinornis.

The curators and directors were properly impressed with the superintendent's marvelous deductions and evidence of infinite labors, but to say that they accepted even this great man's theory with polite skepticism would be under-emphasis. They distinctly had their tongues in their cheeks, but were too polite to challenge his findings. How could they? Nobody knew anything about the matter at all. Anybody's guess or reconstruction was as good as the next man's.

Thus, for many years there reposed in the British Museum this one piece of leg bone which had served as the sole clue for Richard Owen's entire reconstruction of the Dinornis. The matter had been pretty well forgotten when there came news that another expedition to study the fossilized remnants of Australasia had located additional bones of the huge bird called the Dinornis.

Excitement was rife in scientific circles when these precious bones reached England and members of the Museum staff began the arduous task of classifying and reconstructing the big bird's skeleton.

To the amazement of everybody save Sir Richard Owen, when the skeleton was completed the real bird proved to be identical with the one Sir Richard had visualized from that first single bone. The great student of Nature's bone-yard had unerringly built up a faultless picture of the Dinornis, and his papers on this method of bone reconstruction have not only proved invaluable in the recovery of knowledge about extinct bird, animal and fish forms, but has become an important part of modern criminal investigation.

Sir Richard Owen

Sir Richard Owen is the father of the Bertillon system of measurements and the accurate reconstruction of a once living body from just a fragment or two of bone.

RIDING ON AIR

THE rosy-cheeked lad came dashing breathlessly into the house.

"Dad!" he cried. "Dad, I'm going to be in the race next Saturday!"

Dr. Dunlop looked up from the peculiar contraption he was tinkering with. It was a disk of wood about the rather wide rim of which was a perimeter of dull and mottled gray stuff which looked not unlike a sick snake coiled around a butcher's block. It bulged alarmingly in some places and was distressingly thin and attenuated in others, but close examination proved it to be nothing more deadly than a circular length of rubber tubing.

"You are, Jock?" the doctor asked in fatherly tolerance. "That's verra nice indeed."

The boy's face fell as he watched his father turn back to contemplate his gadget. He had just thought of something.

"But perhaps it isn't so nice, Father," he said as the veterinary poked experimentally at a section of the crude tubing. "Your wheel is too big for me, and mine needs a new band of rubber."

"Eh?" said the father after a guilty pause, looking up with a start. "Did the inner wire finally break, son?"

The boy nodded. "If I may," he said hesitantly, "I'll take the wheel down to the blacksmith and have a new tyre put on. Mr. MacGregor said he would have in some new black India rubber bands this week."

Funny talk about bicycles between father and son. But it was the year 1887 in Belfast, Ireland. Dr. John Boyd Dunlop was a renowned veterinary surgeon. A Scot by birth, he had some zany notions about tinkering with things that didn't rightly concern a good farrier, his Irish neighbors could attest to that.

Hadn't they seen him wasting his time fooling around with costly India rubber in his little workshop back of his house, actually constructing hollow tubes of the elastic stuff which was good for toy balloons, dolls, and rubber balls? In spite of their laughs hadn't he made this very crude set of continuous cushions for that ridiculous little vehicle he trundled around in his backyard?

Of course. And a silly sort of business for a full-grown man and a fine horse doctor. If he wanted to fool around with tyres, any good smithy had solid bands of rubber and a brawny-armed smith to draw the tread on his buggy wheels. Why waste time with this flimsy stuff? And he actually inflated these lumpy monstrosities with *air!*

But Dr. John Dunlop was not just a goof. He was a dreamer. Brought up on a farm in Scottish Ayrshire, he had watched many a lumbering wood-wheeled cart wear itself out on the rocky roads of his native heath. He had seen more than one fine broth of a smith shrink a metal rim about a frame of wooden fellies and spokes. Rough and rocky, but durable, were the old tyres of wood or iron.

When Dr. Dunlop was only four years old, back in 1844, an American inventor was fooling around with a compound of that new—and rather useless—black gum called rubber and accidentally discovered the secret of vulcanization with sulphur which gave life and vitality to the gum and made it resistant to heat and cold. This gave the rubber industry a great boom, and John Boyd Dunlop grew to manhood in time to see solid rubber tyres replace the metal

But the successful veterinary saw inflated rubber balls and other such things, and he remembered the unresilient black tyres of vehicles and he wondered why there couldn't be a pneumatic rubber tyre which would make riding easier.

The result was the little rubber-tyred cart he wheeled around in his backyard.

"Dad, are you listening to me?" demanded Jock anxiously. "I'm to ride in a bicyle race next Saturday, and I need a new wheel band."

"Aye, lad, that I am," said Dr. Dunlop, his voice suddenly ringing and clear. "And ye have seen your father experimenting with this contrivance now for months. Well, 'tis time we put it to a practical test. I tell ye, son, that pneumatic tyres are easier to ride and faster to travel—like traveling on air—which is what it really is. I'm going to mount a pair of these tubes on your wheel."

"What, those things?" cried the boy, aghast. "They'll tear—or puncture."

"Not if ye have any luck at all. Dinna argue. Come to the workshop with me."

The upshot of this conference was that the following Saturday Jock Dunlop entered the bicycle race with a pair of ropy and spottily bulging pneumatic tubes on his wheel as compared to the solid rubber tyres of his competitors. Amid jeers and laughter he took off at the start.

The laughter and jeers faded into wonder. For young Jock outrode the sturdiest-legged lads in the race, easily coming in the victor. For the first time man had ridden on inflated rubber, and a revolution of transportation was just around the corner. Dr. Dunlop had dreamed, and then had worked to make his dream come true. In truth, man would henceforth ride on air.

The invention was tested, and patented on December 7, 1888. And on December 7, 1941, America became conscious of the fact that the whole world travels on rubber and air, and that the modern tire is a product quite as necessary to freedom as wings and gasoline.

Hart Niles and Dr. Beckwith Make a Short Trip through the Void—Just a Little Matter of 800,000 Years of Travel—

IN

CITY OF GLASS

An Amazing Complete Book-Length Novel

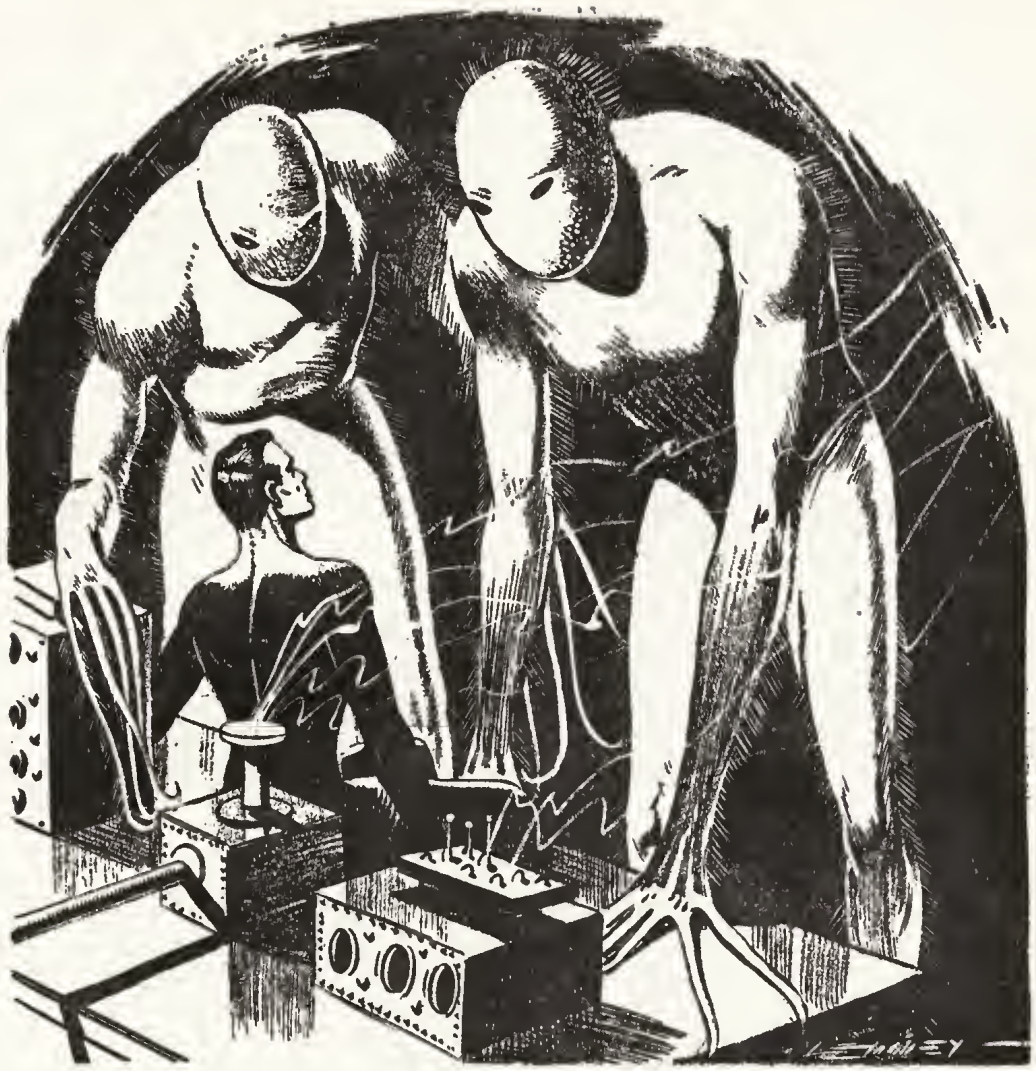
BY NOEL LOOMIS

•

VISIT THE ASTONISHING WORLD OF SILICON MEN!

•

Coming in the Next Issue



They had no mouths, yet he heard speech from those round green heads

MACROCOSMIC

By G. L. MADDOCKS

Jim Hughes Is Resurrected from an Atom and a Drop of Water by the Massive Men of Rotana After His Body Absorbs the Entire Solar System!

JIM HUGHES, eyes riveted on the rear observation screen, watched the dark bulk of Pluto shrink into a shadowy blot as it reeled backward into the vasts of space. When the coldly twinkling sun had taken its place among the million pinpoints of light dotting the blackness of the screen, he rechecked his instruments carefully and drew a deep breath.

"I'm well out of the solar system now," he muttered. "Here goes the trans-dimensional drive."

His swift fingers flashed over the broad surface of the instrument board before him—adjusted the pointers on the center dial, and touched two glowing amber buttons. A low, vibrant hum filled the little cabin of the ship. As the hum began to rise in pitch, Hughes settled back in his pilot seat to wait.

"Well, that's done—now to see what happens." He tried to feel nonchalant as he thought of the unknown into which he was plunging. He was well aware that, in trying out this revolutionary trans-dimensional device, he was risking his life, or at least taking a chance that he would never see the solar system again.

Everything had worked out perfectly on paper, but one never could tell. Even if the trans-dimensional drive *did* hurtle him to the edge of our galaxy as he had planned, conditions there might snuff out his life before he could set the return mechanism into motion.

His meditations were cut short by a sudden, nauseating sensation of falling. The *Astra* seemed to be falling end over end. He hardly had time to realize what was happening, however, before the shrill, screaming hum ceased abruptly. Instantly the ship righted itself; the pit of his stomach settled down; all seemed as before.

A little disappointed, he glanced at the observation screen, which spread before him a miniature panorama of space. He gasped. Gone were the familiar constellations, the diamond dust splendor of the Milky Way! Along the lower half of the screen, etched blindly against the blackness, were n u m b e r l e s s great glowing worlds, set against a background thickly powdered with points of light. The jeweled display thinned out toward the middle of the screen, leaving vast depths of inky nothingness in the upper half.

"Well, here I am, wherever it is!" Hughes wet his lips a trifle nervously and rapidly began to make his observations.

Just as he had set the motion picture camera clicking in front of the screen, a grinding shudder shook the craft from end to end. A cold, milky mist enveloped him.

"I've hit something!"

Some strange force was pulling and twisting at his vitals. What was happening to everything? The whole ship was shrinking, buckling; and the walls collapsed toward him. Eerie blue flame flickered all about him. He had time for one flashing thought—strange laws of energy in control here on the edge of the universe must be playing mad tricks on him. The walls of the ship flared into blue incandescence as they touched his pain-racked body.

THE next moment he was struggling wildly in space, hazily wondering why he did not instantly explode in the vacuum or freeze into a lifeless lump. The rest was flaming shrieking chaos. Stars came hurtling out of the blackness, momentarily enlarging until they filled half the sky, then shrinking, dissolving, as they enveloped his tortured, writhing body in searing, coruscating force.

He felt himself expanding, horribly, irresistibly as all space rushed toward him. He seemed to be the center of a whirling, screaming vortex of energy gone mad. His brain reeled; he was only fitfully conscious. Wild visions leaped in and out of his flickering mind memories of huge dynamos, blue sparks spitting insanely; lightning ripping the skies asunder; the blasts of atomic engines, setting free the unspeakable power of disrupted atoms.

Once a wheeling nebula plunged toward him. He instinctively threw his hands in front of his face, and shouted in incredulous horror. He could see through the glittering dust of the nebula before it exploded into blue energy and smothered him in a blaze of fury.

Once, gyrating wildly, he caught a glimpse over his shoulder of a whirling plane of brilliance—a tiny sun no larger than an acorn, surrounded by rotating silver specks. He could have scooped them up in his vast, nebulous hand — then as his bulk swirled nearer and caught them in its attraction, the ordered circling faltered.

The sun shuddered, halted in its tiny course — and plunged headlong toward him, trailed by its bevy of planets. A moment of agonizing heat . . . then the whole system melted into blue mist.

Comets hurtling through the vasts of space turned from their ages-old orbits and soared toward him as toward a titanic magnet. In a wavering flash of lucidity he realized that all the matter, all the energy of the universe, was flowing toward and converging in him, expanding his unspeakable bulk. At intervals his body was nearly transparent; again it would solidify as a whole solar system bombarded him.

Ages later the flame-shot blackness gave way to a blinding white light. Instead of spasmodic stabs of pain as entire worlds poured their energy into his helpless body, he became aware of a steady pulsing that racked him in mingled torture and ecstasy.

The dreadful falling and twisting gradually ceased. The white glare began to break into nebulous grey shadows, constantly shifting and dwindling.

As his head cleared, he became aware of thoughts coursing through his brain—not his own thoughts, but alien, incomprehensible ones. He could not understand them, but he sensed the presence of brooding personalities in the gleaming haze. Suddenly a gigantic shape loomed above him, and he was thrown on his face as a rush of wind howled past. Consciousness faded.

WHEN Jim Hughes regained his senses, he was lying on a rough brown surface that crawled and shifted beneath him. Dim shadows surrounded him, changing and solidifying with the passing moments. The waves of energy still were pouring through him, and alien thoughts were coming more clearly. He sensed impressions of exultation, of intense, brooding curiosity. He rolled over on his back, striving to hold his position against the uneasy movement of his resting place.

Staring upward into the bluish haze, he began to make out a vast shadow above him—immeasurably distant, but steadily nearing and growing more and more distinct and solid. A sidewise glance filled him with incredulous amazement. The shadows all around him gradually were sharpening in outline. They resolved themselves into tremendous pieces of machinery, gleaming articles of laboratory equipment. As the roaring, phantasmic transformation went on, he began to discern a head and shoulders looming above him.

Without warning, the maelstrom abruptly focused and came to a standstill. The cessation of pain and noise and motion smote him with almost crushing force. When his dizziness had faded, his eyes began to accustom themselves to their surroundings, and he sat up groggily. He thought he had been through too much to be particularly surprised at a n y t h i n g. Nevertheless his brain almost refused to credit what his eyes saw. He was sitting on top of a huge table littered with unfamiliar apparatus. Leaning eagerly toward him were two gigantic figures, vaguely human, yet horrifyingly alien.

Their gleaming, slitted eyes bored into his from faces unlike any he had seen even on the outer solar planets. Aside from those glowing eyes, they had no features—no noses, mouths, or ears! Yet he heard speech from the round green heads—or was it, rather, thought that gave the illusion of speech?

"We've done it! We've done it!" The emanation fairly sang its triumph and exultation. "An-Ha. . . ." There was an abrupt break that reminded him of the clamping down of a spy-ray shield; then:

"You *are* intelligent? You understand us?"

Hughes' mouth dropped open.

"Why—yes," he stammered. "But you . . . who are you? Where did you find me? What is this place?"

"Later, later."

Hughes slid to the edge of the table and jumped down. Sitting on his perch and gazing at the great room, he found himself completely dwarfed by his gigantic surroundings. To his earth-trained eyes, the transparent

glass ceiling seemed to loom at least fifty feet above him. Every object in the place appeared to be twice as large as it should be.

Strange, that he who had so short a time ago appeared to fill the universe itself, should now feel like a pigmy in alien territory!

HE HAD to crane his neck to look up at the giants before him. What monsters! They were worse than the *khutti* of Mars—round heads, absurdly small trunks, heavy legs, and long, sinuous arms ending in a cluster of tentacles. Their green, oddly iridescent bodies were unhampered by clothing.

Just as he was marveling at their green bodies, he caught a glimpse of his own legs, and gasped. Unbelievingly, he examined his arms, his naked torso. His skin had the same cast as theirs! In sudden panic, his hands flew to his mouth, his ears. They felt perfectly normal—only his skin had changed.

Space! That reminded him—how had he gotten here? What was the meaning of that nightmarish cataclysm that had held him in its grip? Or was it a nightmare, a delirium induced by the alien forces in control of the edge of space? His insistent questions were drowned out by waves of even more insistent thought from the two titans, now seated in front of him.

"Describe your world—the life on it—the means of maintaining life—everything, everything!"

At long last, rebelling against the ruthless probing into the very depths of his intellect and memory, he cried out:

"But who are you? Where am I and how did I get here?"

A dreadful thought seemed to wrench at his brain but was instantly erased by the soothing thought waves of the one called An-Ha.

"Never mind. You must rest now. It is sufficient that we found you and brought you to our own world."

"But I thought—" A wave of weakness engulfed him at the memory of that crazed interval.

"Yes, no doubt you were the victim of many strange delusions. Think no more of them. You are safe now."

"Then—I'm in another universe?"

He felt a current of grim amusement, a current interrupted by An-Ha, who shot an admonitory warning toward the other being.

"Enough, Sut-Ga, enough!" Then to Hughes:

"Yes, you are in another universe, but a friendly one. You will doubtless find much to interest you here on Rotana."

HE DID. Certainly nothing was like any world he had ever known in his exploration of the solar system. The red and yellow twin suns that rotated slowly about each other bathed their satellite in alternately reddish and yellow light. The city, a cluster of one-story buildings made of a transparent, glass substance, was built along the margin of a lake. Behind the city the monotony of the plain stretched to a distant horizon.

But the really incredible thing about Rotana was something that he was not fully aware of until the night after his arrival. An-Ha, obviously the more friendly of the two scientists, had taken him to his own home, a glass cubicle transformed into a snug, tentlike haven by heavy blue curtains which the Rotanan pulled over the transparent sides.

"Very cozy," Hughes commented; "but what about ventilation?"

An-Ha was puzzled for a moment. Then:

"Oh, yes! I recall that you told us about your race's revolting and clumsy method of maintaining life—absorbing plants and animals and sucking in the atmosphere. Haven't you noticed that you are not—breathing, as you call it?"

Hughes was too astonished to comprehend for a moment. Then he tried to breathe and discovered he had no more control over his lungs than he did over his heart! Yet he felt no discomfort.

"I don't believe it!" he exclaimed. "You mean I am not breathing—that I don't need oxygen?"

"Exactly! Aside from your physical form, you have changed complete-

ly. When we found you wandering in the outer reaches of your universe, we treated you with an elixir that we have perfected, to endow you with the power to absorb energy through your skin, directly from the light rays falling on it. Now, like us, you need not go through the primitive process of breaking down substances and converting them into the life force."

HUGHES discovered another angle of the life-force the morning of his encounter with the devourer.

Although he no longer became hungry, he had discovered that he craved water, as the others did. At intervals after the rest period, he would experience an intense longing to soak his body in the cool water of the lake. His iridescent skin, so different from its old self, burned and crawled restlessly until he immersed himself in the fluid, which it absorbed eagerly.

On this particular occasion he made his way down the narrow streets to the gaily-colored tiled bathing flats and selected a convenient niche. He sank gratefully into the shallow tub and grasped the hand- and foot-holds that prevented him from floating. He had hardly immersed himself than he felt a sharp sting on the sole of his foot. He jerked upright, his blood freezing as he saw a bloated brown shape hanging to him.

He snatched his foot from the stirrup-like holder, to dislodge the loathsome thing. It simply elongated, like a giant leech, and kept its hold. His strong green fingers tried to claw the nauseous mass loose, but it was like attempting to grasp a piece of jelly or an under-inflated balloon. It wriggled from his hands and maintained its grip.

Hughes began to realize his predicament when he became conscious of a dreadful, dragging weakness. He cursed himself for coming out before any of the others were stirring. Not a soul was near to help him, and perhaps no one would sense the frantic signals he was sending out with all the force of his fading consciousness. His struggles grew weaker, a cloud gathered before his eyes. . . .

He was awakened by a familiar flood of mingled pain and enjoyment. Still only half conscious, he was aware of an interchange of thought-waves nearby. Someone was thinking regretfully:

"He is coming back. What a pity! I had hoped—"

An-Ha broke in sharply:

"Sut-Ga, you are barbarous! He is an intelligent being, just as we are, in spite of his hideousness. It would be murder!"

"My friend, you are too sentimental for a man of science! Think what we would learn if we examined his incredible mechanism first hand!"

The thought streams shut off abruptly as he stirred and opened his eyes. An-Ha pushed away the gleaming ray-lamp.

"Enough! We applied the energy bath in time."

Hughes sat up weakly.

An-Ha looked down from his great height.

"You were very nearly the victim of the devourer." Then, turning reproachful eyes toward his colleague:

"Sut-Ga, this is your doing! You placed that loathsome creature in the lake, when I asked you to kill it!"

Hughes stared from one to the other, puzzled.

"But I thought you told me that everything on this planet gathered its energy direct from the light rays?"

"Everything that is native, or that, like you, we have properly adapted," An-Ha corrected him.

"Well, where did the thing come from?"

Again that current of maliciousness from Sut-Ga, quickly blanketed by An-Ha.

"We—transferred it from another world, as we did you. But our elixir did not work perfectly in the case of the devourer." He turned to Sut-Ga again. "Why didn't you destroy it, as you promised?"

"I wanted to see what it would do," Sut-Ga admitted shamelessly.

"At the risk of life!"

"What of it? How else are we going to gain knowledge?"

They were still wrangling when

Hughes slipped away to the beach. His half-formed resolution to get away from Rotana had hardened into determination. Somehow he must persuade An-Ha to return him to his own universe—wherever that was. Perhaps he was even in a different dimension. The delirium he had experienced inclined him to the latter belief. Before he could do much, however, he must find out the exact situation. An-Ha's puzzling reticence, Sut-Ga's malicious enjoyment—both attitudes covered some sinister riddle.

"There's just one thing to do," he told himself, absently kicking up the multi-colored crystal sands of the beach. He must loiter about the laboratory as much as they would allow him. Perhaps some stray wisps of thought, some piece of equipment, would yield the answer. At any rate, in the laboratory lay the answer to the riddle.

HE FOUND that answer much sooner than he had expected.

The two scientists had pointedly excluded him when beginning a new experiment. Quite shamelessly he concealed himself in the spongy red and green *hatiya* shrubbery at the back of the building, hoping that their thought-waves would penetrate the curtained walls. He sat motionless, shielding his own thoughts as best he could.

Suddenly he leaped to his feet, caution forgotten. Signals of distress, of terror, were pouring unguarded from the two within! He dashed around to the door, pulled it open—and stood a moment in horrified astonishment.

The laboratory was swarming with hideous, unthinkable shapes—writhing, unclean forms such as he had sometimes viewed through a microscope — but now huge, terrifying. Even as he watched, An-Ha went down beneath the scrambling, sucking horde. Sut-Ga, fighting his way to the wall, caught sight of the petrified Hughes.

"Close that door, you fool!" His frantic waves seared into Hughes' brain. "Throw me one of those disintegrators, and use one yourself!"

Hughes came out of his trance; together they sprayed the loathsome invaders with the deadly rays, and the monsters, one after another, fell into decaying heaps and pools of corruption. Time after time one of the creatures would fasten to an arm or a leg of one of the defenders, to retain its hold until rayed into destruction. At last, the laboratory freed of the monstrous apparitions, and what was left of An-Ha hastily covered with a curtain, Sut-Ga busied himself in treating his wounds and those of Hughes. When he had finished, Hughes climbed onto one of the benches and looked questioningly at Sut-Ga.

"You have at last justified your existence," the latter admitted.

Hughes ignored the doubtful compliment.

"Where did they come from? Were they some more of your transfers from other universes or dimensions, or wherever you have been bringing us poor guinea pigs from?" His face set into bitter lines.

"Now that the only friend I had on this cockeyed world is dead, I want to get out of here. You'd have told me long ago just how you brought me here, except that An-Ha wouldn't let you. Now out with it! I can take it!"

"Are you sure?" Sut-Ga was mocking him. "Very well. You were brought up from the depths of your atom."

"Atom?" Hughes' utter lack of comprehension seemed to amuse the inscrutable being towering above him.

"YES. With your obviously limited intellect, you will probably find difficulty in grasping the facts. However, I will do my best to explain. My colleague," he glanced casually toward the huddled curtain in the corner, "invented a powerful microscope which probes into the very heart of matter. As we penetrated to greater depths and saw evidences of minute life in molecules and even in atoms, we became convinced that electrons themselves might support forms of life.

"We also discovered a compound that has an attraction for the elec-

tron and possesses the power to search out bits of living tissue. Once it finds a living entity, this elixir endows it with the power to absorb all matter around it in the form of energy. Of course, sometimes the elixir does not work quite as we expect, and the result is like the devourer or," he glanced around at the wrecked laboratory, "what you saw today.

"In your case, however, our experiment was quite successful. Being in the outer reaches of your universe, you were the first to receive a touch of this substance, and immediately began to absorb into yourself all the matter of your own electron—growing larger, of course, as your body was fed by the waves of energy flowing into you from all sides.

"Your electron absorbed, you drew into yourself the energy of the whole atom, then adjacent ones, and then the entire molecule of water in which you existed.

"Before you had completely absorbed your atom, you were becoming visible through the microscope, and we watched with interest your progress into our own world. At last, the entire drop of water gone, we applied our energy-ray apparatus and allowed you to expand to your present size. Then the rays were shut off . . . and here you are."

If Hughes' brain had reeled before, it nearly went off-balance altogether now, as he strove to comprehend the monstrous, incredible thing he was hearing.

"You mean . . . you mean that I came out of *a drop of water?* Why, that's impossible, it's unbelievable! Our universe is limitless, so huge the mind can't grasp it—"

Sut-Ga did not try to conceal his amused contempt, although his featureless face betrayed no emotion, save for a glitter of the hideous eyes.

"Size—what is that? It is a purely relative term. Doubtless in your world there were countless atoms in which existed whole universes equally large to their inhabitants.

"We of Rotana have a theory that our own world, so impressive to us, is but an atom in some far vaster universe."

Suddenly the enormity of what the scientist had been saying burst in on his listener.

"You mean it's impossible for me to get back—ever?"

"Naturally. It is all gone."

"All gone! But the earth—the whole solar system—the stars—it can't be. . . ."

Sut-Ga was wearying of his denseness.

"Can't you understand? *All that is a part of you now—forms a part of your body!"*

Hughes had many times faced death with equanimity. But this thing sent him chill with horror, as thoughts began to form around the ghastly truth he was being forced to accept. It couldn't be true—it simply couldn't! And yet—he remembered that wild fall through space; the incredible, monstrous expansion as he absorbed nebulae and suns alike; the gradual solidifying and focusing of his surroundings as he found himself lying on a table in this very room. All that unbelievable experience had not been a delusion, then!

HE STARED at his arms, his hands, while disconnected thoughts raced through his brain.

"Only a drop of water! Gone—all gone! I destroyed them. . . . "

At last, mad with despair, he leaped to his feet.

"You devil!" he screamed. "You have destroyed our civilization—our magnificent civilization that we developed over thousands of years!"

Sut-Ga's complete lack of sympathy or remorse chilled him into momentary inaction.

"Don't be an utter fool! You and all your kind must have destroyed countless civilizations yourselves every time you set your atomic engines to work. What do you think your wonderful atom-disrupting machines, which you were so inordinately proud of, would do to the worlds nestled inside the molecules of fuel and water? Such destruction cannot be avoided in the march of science.

"Besides, the time you speak of—what is that but, like size, a relative term? Who knows — perhaps this

whole universe of yours sprang into being, developed your vaunted civilization, and died—all in the space of time it took me to dip the water from the lake and place a drop under the microscope."

But Hughes had reached the limit of his endurance. Blind with grief and horror, he stumbled out the door.

DAYS later, when he had begun to recover from the shock of Sut-Ga's revelation, he found himself again in the laboratory, as if drawn there by an irresistible, morbid fascination. He was staring through the microscope at a drop of water. . . .

Without warning he felt himself smothered by a flood of wild, unshielded thoughts lashing from the brain of Sut-Ga, who had been moodily watching him.

"I will do it! Yes, I will explore new universes! Is that bit of pond-scum to know an experience that I can never have? No—I too will rise into new worlds . . . I will experience the thrill of conquering whole galaxies!"

Hughes whirled around in time to see the scientist fastening to his grotesque waist an odd instrument slung on a belt.

"What are you doing?"

"Doing! I am going to emulate your feat! This world is only a part of another, and that in turn of another, and so on to the very borders of Infinity! This instrument, which I have just completed, will halt my development at will — growing with me, so that, after I have absorbed my own atom—or universe, if you prefer—I may stop when I wish, go on when I wish!"

"But your own people—" Hughes gasped.

"Bah! Stupid creatures! What do I care for them? I want knowledge—power—omnipotence!"

Too late his listener broke the chains of amazement as Sut-Ga dashed over to the shelf where the precious flask of elixir was standing. Hughes raced desperately across the floor and leaped to the great table standing under the shelf. Just as Sut-Ga reached for the vial, the other made a frantic grab for it.

The fragile container crushed in his fingers, and the liquid splashed over him. Dimly, as that familiar agony twisted him once more in its grip, he sensed Sut-Ga's mad frustration and terror. His reeling brain made his hands leap out and wrench the control-belt from the helpless giant, already writhing in crackling blue flame.

Again he was the center of an incandescent blue vortex. But this time, through the torture of his befogged brain, he felt a fierce exultation—the exultation of a pioneer into the unknown.

"New worlds . . . " he muttered; "new worlds. . . . "

Follow the World's Greatest Space-Farer in Our Companion Magazine

CAPTAIN FUTURE

Featured in the Spring Issue

OUTLAWS OF THE MOON

A Complete Book-Length Novel

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Now on Sale **15c** *At All Stands*

SCIENCE Question BOX

DEPOSED CHAMP

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

Is aluminum the lightest of the commercial metals?—S. O. J., Los Angeles, Calif.

By no means. Both beryllium and magnesium are lighter by far and both are used commercially. Aluminum is really in the middle-weight class. Lithium, the lightest of metals, has too low a melting point to be of any use structurally. Beryllium is important as an alloying agent. But magnesium is rapidly deposing aluminum as the light-weight of commerce.

Magnesium base alloys contain at least 85% pure magnesium and are used in myriad ways from triminings to light structural frameworks. The present U. S. output is about ninety million pounds per year, its main source being from sea water. There are, even in its low concentration, about four and one-half million tons of magesium to one cubic mile of sea water.

Hence, one cubic mile of sea water will yield ninety million pounds per year for one hundred years. Scientific estimation figures the sea to comprise a volume of 323,000,000 cubic miles. On top of which erosion and drainage are constantly adding to the sea's supply of this metal in solution. There is little likelihood of a shortage of magnesium.

THE EXPANDING UNIVERSE

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

A question in your March department about the end of the world started an argument between a friend and me about the the Universe. Just what is meant by the term, "expanding Universe"?—A. D. L., Dallas, Texas.

This term covers generally our present whole of creation. Man has never known any other sort of Universe; nor is his species likely to survive to see any other kind. While scientists are not fuliy in accord in their theories, it is generally conceded that all of the matter in the entire Universe is expanding outward from a once common center, and from other particles of this same matter in the shape of stars and planets and galaxies. Whither this spherical expansion leads no man knows, but it can be likened to a vast cosmic bomb which exploded a calculable length of time ago, the bits of which have been flying apart ever since.

While it is true that the Earth may be a fairly recent creation by comparison to sun and stars and galaxies—and a number of ingenious theories for its formation have been advanced—the chances are that Earth is just about as old as the rest of the Universe, at least, in the substance of which it is composed.

We arrive at this conclusion—possibly erroneous—in this fashion:

Science through the study of radium, rocks, etc., places the age of the Earth at about 2,500,000,000 years. Dr. George Gamow, professor of theoretical physics at George Washington University estimates the age of the sun at no more than 3,000,000,000 years.

The evidence of astronomy indicates that the expanding and out-rushing stars and galaxies could have been packed in one indistinguishable whole—if they were so packed —no more than 3,000,000,000 years ago. Thus, the answers come out astonishingly even. The entire mass may be just a billowing puff of smoke from the gigantic tobacco pipe of a Colossus on a super-world.

What we can be sure of is that we have had an expanding Universe for three billion years. Previous to that time the Universe was a vastly different thing. As for what it will be like billions of years in the future—your guess is as good as Professor Einstein's .

GRAY HAIR PANACEA

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

Is it true that vitamin B will restore natural color to the hair? J. P., Long Island City, N. Y.

This question narrowly misses coming under the classification of beauty hints. However, there is some scientific worth to it. Dr. B. F. Sieve, of Boston City Hospital, has reported the successful administration of para-aminobenzoic aide—one of the B vitamins—in daily doses to some three hundred patients with such gratifying results.

Nevertheless, the field of vitamin experimentation is so comparatively unexplored that your science editor cannot hazard a positive statement on this subject. What he wants to see is a vitamin which will grow **any** color of hair on a bald head.

BORGIA BUSINESS

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

Is powdered glass poisonous when fed into the human system?—H. S. M., Miami, Fla.

No. Contrary to superstition and popular belief, a quantity of finely ground glass mixed with food is practically innocuous. Rats fed on such experimental diets did not die and when killed and examined, their alimentary tracts proved to be in normal condition. Glass, to be dangerous, would have to be taken in such jagged and coarse pieces as manually to puncture the stomach or intestines. The deadliness of ground glass as an internal poison proves to be just another popular fallacy.

Address Your Questions to SCIENCE QUESTION BOX, STARTLING STORIES, 10 East 40th Street, New York City

THE MAKING OF MISTY ISLE

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

In That Peaceful Generation Before Pearl Harbor, Evil Men Strove to Turn the Pacific into a Seething Caldron!

WITHIN an oak-paneled office in one of the capitals of the Western Hemisphere, four men were gathered in sober consultation. Three of them were advanced in years, with the wizened looks, the crafty eyes, the confirmed cynicism of aspect common among elderly politicians.

The fourth, a man not yet out of his thirties, appeared in some ways the shrewdest of the group, and in his large sagacious eyes there was a light as cold as that glimmering from winter ice.

He it was who, with a chart unfolded before him, was addressing the small gathering. They listened to him with intent, calculating glances as his fluent words came forth.

"Yes, Mr. President," he was saying, with a nod toward the grayest and most shriveled of his companions. "The scheme is entirely practicable. And you, Mr. Secretary, and you, General Blackfoot"—here he pointed toward the two other men—"will have to agree. For ten years I have been working out the plan, and there is no engineering detail that my experts and I have not thoroughly weighed and tested."

EDITOR'S NOTE

Some stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "The Making of Misty Isle," by Stanton A. Coblentz, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFICTION'S HALL OF FAME.

In each issue, for several forthcoming numbers, we will reprint one of the most outstanding fantasy classics of all time, as selected by our readers.

We hope in this way to bring a new prominence to the science fiction gems of yesterday and to perform a real service to the science fiction devotees of today and tomorrow.

"Then you mean," drawled the individual addressed as "Mr. President," "you mean that it will be possible to create an island artificially? And the procedure will be safe and efficient? We may contemplate the completion of the work within two years? Is that the idea, Mr. Turnbull?"

Turnbull nodded gravely.

"Beyond that," put in General Blackfoot, "may we be sure that the island will be in a position of strategic importance? And that the operations can be kept scrupulously secret?"

Again Turnbull nodded.

"Just look at this chart," he requested, pointing to a spot somewhere in the northern Pacific. "You see here a location well off all the regular ship lanes. It is hundreds of miles from any known island, and yet not much over a thousand miles from the eastern coast of Asia.

"Now, at one point, where we have investigated, the sea bottom rises out of a tremendously deep trough to within fifty fathoms of the surface. This is evidently the peak of a submarine mountain—or, rather, a submarine volcano. And it is this peak which we propose to elevate until it overtops the waves."

The speaker paused and, with heavy fingers stroking his huge square chin, looked out across the long room with its neat, even rows of desks, its tall filing cabinets and high sectional bookcases.

"Are you perfectly sure no one can overhear us?" he whispered.

"Perfectly sure," returned the President, with a confident glance toward the barred door. "I gave advance orders to the Secret Service. There is no danger of spies."

A furtive light flashed into Turnbull's chilly eyes.

"Well, then, this is what I should propose," he continued, in low, significant tones. "We will induce the legislature to vote an extra ten millions under the blanket term of 'military appropriations.' With those ten millions we will set about, in absolute secrecy, to carry out our scheme.

"The main thing, of course, will be to keep the facts concealed. When our island has been created, its uses will be many. It will be invaluable as a military center. It will serve as a naval coaling station; it will be a center for harboring and re-embarkation of military forces.

The waters came rushing in on them, quenching all things amid a chaos of hopeless struggling

"It will be indispensable as a submarine and aviation base, from which our undersea craft may harry Asiatic commerce and our bombing planes destroy the coastal cities. Then at last the conquest of eastern China or Siberia, or of Japan itself, will not be beyond our grasp."

A shrewd gleam appeared in General Blackfoot's small keen eyes.

"A magnificent project," he approved. "Really, a patriotic service of the first rank. But I still am not convinced of its feasibility. You will have to make the first part of your plan a little clearer, Dr. Turnbull. Just how are we to lift this island out of the ocean?"

TURNBULL smiled tolerantly, and explained.

"As I was saying before, the idea offers no exceptional technical difficulties. The region we have chosen is not only volcanic, but actively volcanic. Innumerable reports, seismographic and otherwise, show that constant disturbances are occurring beneath the surface. Indeed, the record of tidal waves alone would prove the occurrence of submarine volcanic eruptions.

"Now, what does all this imply? Clearly, that not far beneath the sea bed, there is an enormous vein of the molten rock, or magma, which is believed to give rise to volcanic eruptions. This overheated rock, together with tremendous quantities of hot vapor, is continually pressing upward in the attempt to escape. Only the opposing pressure of the solid crust prevents it from spouting forth violently.

"But occasionally the fuming torrents below, breaking through some fissure or fault in the earth, become powerful enough to overcome the pressure of the crust; and then we have a volcanic eruption. Such eruptions hitherto have been due wholly to natural causes. But there is no reason why they cannot be created artificially.

"If the crust above is weakened sufficiently, they can be produced almost at will. And it is my object actually to produce one—and to produce it beneath the sea. By means of a new super-explosive—'hyperblast' I call it—I will be able to blow away the bed of the sea, to a depth of hundreds of feet; thereby diminishing the pressure upon the molten magma beneath, and enabling the white-hot liquid and the torrid fumes to break to the surface in an eruption of exceptional violence.

"The released material will be certain to pile up to a considerable height, surmounting the surface of the sea and giving birth to a new island. You may take my word for it when I tell you this can be done. As chief engineering consultant for the government, and the inventor of hyperblast, I have had the opportunity to test the project to the last detail."

An impressive silence followed this recital. General Blackfoot leaned far back in his swivel chair, a gleam of exultant interest in his ferret eyes. The President sat pulling meditatively at his thin shred of a grayish beard, for all the world like a ruminant chewing its cud. Only the Secretary seemed still not quite persuaded.

"This hyperblast of yours makes me wonder, Dr. Turnbull," he confessed. "How is it to be planted at the bottom of the sea? By divers? By submarine? Or are you to shoot it down with a powerful gun?"

The grim face of Dr. Turnbull brightened with just the suggestion of a smile.

"You are becoming frivolous, Mr. Secretary. No, I should not like to try shooting the explosive down with a gun. My method, however, is simpler than that. Wrapped in waterproof containers, and weighted down with lead, the hyperblast will be dropped in neat half-ton packages from the side of a vessel.

"Dozens of such bombs will be released, all of them operating by means of slow time-fuses, and all calculated to explode at the same instant. Needless to say, we will first allow ample time for the vessel to reach port. You may judge of the efficiency of hyperblast when I tell you that it is ten thousand times more powerful than dynamite.

"I discovered the secret of it quite by chance. It is made of a thorium oxide, associated with radioactive compounds. Its peculiar quality is due to a method I have found for accelerating the radioactivity to the point of explosiveness. By comparison with it, TNT appears like a child's cap pistol. Six or eight of the bombs would be sufficient to make kindling wood of the city of New York."

"Good!" declared the Secretary, with an enthusiastic nod. "Splendid! Then you have no doubt at all, Dr. Turnbull? Your new explosive can blow away the surface of the sea and release the subterranean forces?"

"Unquestionably!" affirmed Turnbull.

"Well, I for one move that we adopt the recommendation," urged General Blackfoot, rubbing his thin hands together as at some appetizing prospects. "I feel sure that the measure will make military history."

HE LAUGHED a dry, sly laugh that had in it a faintly malicious suggestion.

"It will make world history," concurred the President, also laughing furtively. "Well, then, if everyone is agreed, I personally will point out to the legislature the need for higher military appropriations. The necessity for self-defense will be my plea. No one except us four, of course, will know what the additional funds are to be used for."

And all four conferees smiled, and congratulated one another. And a few moments later, when they took their way out of the big oak-paneled room, it was with the stern and serious looks of men who contemplate momentous deeds.

During the early months of the following year, the world was startled by the account of a gigantic disturbance in the northern Pacific. Seismographs from London to Tokyo recorded an earthquake of exceptional intensity and of several minutes' duration. All accounts agreed in placing the point of origin somewhere in the northwestern Pacific, at a spot not more than a thousand miles from the Asiatic mainland.

For this reason, authorities concurred in connecting the earthquake with the tidal wave of almost simultaneous occurrence, which was felt from Hawaii to the Aleutian Islands, and from the Chinese mainland to southern California.

No one knows how many fishing smacks were overwhelmed, how many sailing vessels were swamped and capsized in that cataclysmic swelling of the waters, which sent the waves pounding into many an island village, which lifted great steamers and left them high and dry upon sloping beaches, which drowned by the thousands the inhabitants of coastal lowlands, and brought mourning and anguish to twenty nations.

No one can calculate the losses. In the horror of that first unexpected shock, no one could trace the source of the clouds of thin dust and cinders, accompanied in places by sulphurous vapors, which were blown over half the surface of the Pacific, and far inland into China and Siberia, as though from some wide-reaching volcanic outburst.

Scientists, of course, were not slow to recognize that there must actually have been a volcanic disturbance—probably an eruption on some remote and uninhabited island well out of the ordinary ship lanes. The one inexplicable fact was that, even after the passage of months, no island had been observed which showed signs of a recent upheaval.

But what the world generally did not surmise, was that strange and strenuous activities were in progress at some unmapped spot in the Pacific. Where the charts designated no island, an island had come into existence—a bleak, black affair of jagged lava, six miles long and three miles wide, and rising in places to a height of seven or eight hundred feet above the sea.

"Misty Isle," it was called by the few who knew the secret of its existence. The name was well chosen, for the land was shielded from the possible sight of approaching vessels by a perpetual veil of fog.

The fog, however, owed its existence to none of the whims of nature. Had one approached to within a few yards of the shore, one would have observed a multi-

tude of little pipes, from which torrents of steam continually hissed. One would have seen that these pipes, connected with a central heating plant, extended completely around the island, discharging their vapors in such volume that the land was invisible a quarter of a mile away.

From the point of view of sunlight and cheerfulness, this may have been a disadvantage, since the mists and drizzly rains that perpetually overhung the place were a trial to all, except the least susceptible of nerves.

Yet from the practical point of view, the darkness scarcely mattered, since work on the island could be pursued as well by electric light as by the light of the sun.

When—as happened now and then—the sneaking gray form of some naval collier, or some inconspicuous supply ship or transport, came gliding toward the shore, the hazes would always open miraculously, and the vessel would find safe anchorage in a little harbor cut out of the jutting rocks.

It is said, however, that on several occasions an unwanted ship came blundering toward the shore. That once a Japanese tramp, lost in the fog, foundered on the outlying reefs, and that several mechant steamers and one Japanese gunboat, afterward reported missing, came to grief among the uncharted shoals of Misty Isle.

But whether the presence of these craft was deliberate or accidental, it is certain that no member of any of their crews ever returned to make public the story of his adventures.

It is certain, also, that had any such individual returned, he would have had a tale that would have made the world sit up with a gasp and a shudder. For the things that were occurring would have been sufficient to send a wave of apprehension from one end of the earth to the other.

It spite of the heat of the cooling lava—a heat which, even after six months, kept the temperature of Misty Isle hovering about the nineties—prodigious engineering activities were in process of completion. Almost every inch of the island's thirteen square miles was the scene of vigorous operations.

The uneven surface of the land, the deep furrow and chasms, the ragged ridges and cones had been smoothed down and made passable. A line of rocky fortifications was appearing along niches and eminences of the shore. An aviation landing field had been cleared in the center of the island. An artificial harbor for submarines and surface craft had been excavated. Rude wooden shanties for the housing of thousands of men had been installed.

A large concrete building for military supplies was being erected. A plant for distilling sea water, and for engendering electrical power from the waves, had been established. An enormous depositary for coal had come into existence, and some of the black mineral was already in use to produce the clouds of steam about the island.

As yet, of course, the designs of Dr. Turnbull and his associates were far from fulfillment. But the naval department, reporting in strictest confidence the progress of the work, informed him that all things were proceeding according to schedule, and that there was every reason to look for the ultimate triumph of his plans.

A year later, another secret meeting occurred in the large room of the oaken panels. The same four dignitaries participated. They convened in the same sedate and earnest manner as before. One might, in fact, have observed in them the same expression of confident self-importance, of cyncism and craft and world wisdom. In the intervening twenty-four months, they had not changed except in one respect.

ABOUT the eyes of all four, there was a look of exultation that had not been there previously. As they conferred in whispers and from time to time slyly chuckled, they had something of the jubilant, gloating expression of beasts of prey contemplating a prospective victim.

"Well, Turnbull," declared the President, after taking care to see that the door was securely barred and that there was no danger of eavesdroppers, "the long-awaited moment has come! Misty Isle is in readiness. It remains only to make use of it."

Turnbull withdrew the cigar from between his heavy lips, and slowly made reply.

"Yes, it only remains to make use of it. Before leaving the island on my last tour of investigation, I found every detail in order. My part is done. The rest is in the hands of the government."

Turnbull's three companions rubbed their hands in shrewd self-satisfaction, and the predatory gleam in their eyes became more pronounced. It was General Blackfoot who broke the pleased silence that ensued.

"I am sorry to have to confess, Dr. Turnbull, that I have always had one fear. As yet, of course, no one outside the inner circle suspects what we have done. The two thousand workers—members of our naval and marine forces, who were transported to the island involuntarily—have never been allowed to leave, and all their letters have been censored. And so no inopportune word from them is going to spread the news.

"Nonetheless, I have been afraid that some treachery among those in high command might betray our secret. For that reason, I have been anxious to strike, and strike in full force, and strike soon. It is an axiom of military strategy that the speed with which a blow is delivered—"

"Yes, yes, I realize all that," interrupted the President, with an understanding nod. "Do not think that I, too, have not been anxious for quick action. The Secretary here will tell you that he and I have passed many a long night together working out the plans—"

"Indeed we have!" acknowledged the Secretary, scarcely permitting his superior to finish.

Drawing a small chart from an inner pocket, he unrolled it on the table before

the eager eyes of his companions.

"This is the scheme," he continued hastily, while the others bent over him with absorbed attention. "General Blackfoot and Dr. Turnbull may, of course, have amendments to offer. We will begin by sending two hundred bombing planes, of various types, by carriers to Misty Isle. At the same time, fifty submarines will concentrate about the island. Twenty batleships and cruisers, along with double that number of destroyers and colliers and a hundred transports, will proceed to the base, and will be coaled to capacity.

"All that will then be left to attend to will be the official declaration of war. This is a bothersome technicality, which nonetheless we may settle by arranging to insult the Japanese ambassador, or proposing such a vicious anti-Japanese law that Tokyo cannot help protesting. I take it, of course, that Japan will be our first target. We can then follow at our leisure as regards eastern China and Siberia.

"The moment war is declared, it will be won. For, by that time, our bombing planes will be approaching the enemy's coast, and the discharges of hyperblast will not leave two stones standing in any of the important Japanese cities. Naturally, however, we will not cause any more damage than is necessary for strictly military purposes."

"No, naturally not," agreed General Blackfoot, with a low chuckle.

THE Secretary proceeded. "It will be the most sudden and skilful invasion in history. The blow will be delivered so quickly that no one will know where it comes from. The troops from the transports will finish up what our air forces and our fleet leave uncompleted. I propose that we strike immediately!"

"So do I," seconded the general.

"Just one minute," counseled Turnbull, eyeing his companions speculatively. "It seems to me that General Blackfoot, before planning his campaign, should see the island in person. And so should you, Mr. President, and you, Mr. Secretary. I personally recommend that a man-of-war be commissioned to take us all for a brief visit of inspection to Misty Isle. After that, we will be in a better position to act. The delay will not take up more than a month, at most.

The three officials rubbed their gray heads thoughtfully, and a long discussion followed. But the arguments of Turnbull were persuasive, and little by little he made it plain to his companions that haste was likely to mean waste. Both the President and the Secretary ended by confessing a secret desire to see the island.

A few days later, the newspapers bore the tidings that the President, being overtaxed with cares of office, had been ordered by his private physician to take a few weeks' vacation in absolute seclusion. Speculations as to his whereabouts were many, but nothing was known definitely, except that his Secretary and General Blackfoot were to accompany him. At the same time, it was noted that Dr. Turnbull—as very frequently of late—was not to be observed at his offices at the National Bureau of Engineering.

The two thousand marines and naval recruits busy with the routine of work and drill on Misty Isle, did not guess the identity of the four aloof and closely mantled individuals who, accompanied by an armed guard, made their way slowly among the barracks and fortifications. They paused now and then to inspect some interesting detail or to give some order, but never overheard to make any except the most trivial remarks.

Had any of the watching men pressed closely enough, however, he might have heard the visitors occasionally grunting in satisfaction, in wonder, in pleasurable anticipation. He would have known that something nameless and mighty was being agitated in the minds of the inscrutable four.

In all respects but one, the island had met the expectations of the unknown dignitaries. With the planning and execution of the scheme, they could find no fault. The harbor, the aviation field, the storage depots seemed to them to have been designed faultlessly. Even the abominable climate, with the damp heat and the yellow electric light shining perpetually through a foggy glare, seemed to them necessary and consequently praiseworthy.

But one thing there was that caused them some slight concern. On an outlying northern spur of the island, an unlooked-for manifestation had been observed. A torrent of steam and boiling water had leaped up from amid the lava. Investigation proved that the rock, a few feet below the surface, had been heated to a white glare.

Considerable annoyance and even a little alarm was occasioned by this lingering evidence of volcanic activity. But Dr. Turnbull and his experts, conducting a careful examination, concluded that this represented but the last dying gasp of the eruption that had brought Misty Isle into being. Nonetheless, one of the group, taking a pessimistic view, whispered in secret a prophecy that made the cheeks of his fellows turn pale.

But his remarks were greeted with vigorous denials, and in the end were discredited. And the preparations on Misty Isle went on much as in the past.

BEFORE the visiting officials took passage for home, they were to see those preparations reach the final stage. They were to see huge ships come gliding into the harbor like ghostly marauders, and other ships leaving like thieves in the night.

They were to watch troops disembarking by the hundreds and the thousands, marching into barracks made ready long in advance. They were to observe the unloading of guns and torpedoes and gas masks and huge parcels of high explosives. They were to hear mysterious messages whispered in the darkness, to catch sight of sentries standing guard on every hazy eminence.

In their ears the tramp of training myriads was to resound, the sharp orders of the captains and lieutenants, the clicking of rifles and the thudding of bayonets as the recruits charged dummy targets. A droning of airplane motors was to fill the air, and now and then the dull bursting of bombs. While, within the secrecy of well-guarded offices, aging men in uniform were to pore over red-marked charts, pointing meaningly to spot after spot on the islands or mainland of Asia, and issuing orders to subordinates who stole in to them stealthily, and as stealthily disappeared.

At the same time, the four dignitaries were frequently to be seen in the vicinity of the island's well-equipped wireless station. Many a message in a secret code was flashed between them and their home country. It may have been for this reason that, just before their visit drew to a close, strange and disquieting events began to agitate the world at large.

With the unexpectedness of a blast from an untroubled sky, a diplomatic rupture appeared between two of the great nations of the earth. Japan, and that western empire which was the home of Dr. Turnbull and General Blackfoot, had come to swords' points—and for no good reason that anyone could explain.

Even to those who claimed to share in the secret, the source of disturbance was somewhat obscure. There was some question of the violation of some unimportant treaty, the very existence of which was unknown except to diplomats.

Over this treaty, which involved the right to self-government of a few dozen half-civilized islanders somewhere in the South Seas, an imperious message had been sent to the Mikado, worded so arrogantly that no ruler who retained his self-respect could disregard it. As a result, both countries were suddenly in a ferment, and rumors of war filled the air.

General Blackfoot and the President, seated with two companions on a cruiser which steamed slowly from the harbor of Misty Isle, were all aware of the demonstrations that agitated two lands. They knew what a tumult had been caused by ostentatious drilling of troops, the waving of flags, the blaring of bugles, the booming of drums. They knew of the inflammatory speeches, the military parades, the fierce mass gatherings that were fanning the battle flames. They looked upon their handiwork, and were satisfied.

YET they were not so satisfied but that they perceived the need for quick action.

"The preliminaries are now over," summarized the President as, surrounded by his colleagues, he gazed toward the fog-veiled shore of the island. "We have allowed time enough now for everyone to go war-crazy. Therefore, it cannot be said that we struck without warning. No one, of course, suspects what lies ahead. We must give the enemy no chance to prepare. Now is the time! What do you all say?"

The others nodded in keen-eyed approval, and the President resumed.

"Then I shall send a wireless command immediately to the Vice-President. He will act in my absence, and issue the official declaration. And then for the actual test! Tomorrow at this time, there will be not a man or woman or child alive in all the cities of Japan!"

And, with an attempted witticism that somehow drew no response, the President arose and went off in search of the wireless operator.

While he was gone, Dr. Turnbull addressed his companions gravely.

"By the way, that geyser of steam at the northern end of the island seems to be giving trouble again. I saw it this morning, and did not like its looks. It was squirting like a whole fire department, and was twice as high as yesterday."

General Blackfoot shrugged.

"But, of course, it will subside in time," he suggested, with a confident smile.

"Of course!" put in the Secretary.

Dr. Turnbull merely gave a wry grimace, and did not reply. And thenceforth, until the return of the President, the conversation lagged.

"Done! It is done!" that official announced, reappearing and laughing, with a laugh that was like a cackle. "All that remains is to touch off the final fuse!" And his three fellow conspirators joined him in low, clandestine chuckles.

For a moment they glanced in silence toward the gray seas and the gray misty heavens, and toward the island's hidden shore. From here, before another day had passed, a host of winged marauders was to fly like a breath of destruction toward unsuspecting cities.

But destruction of a different nature lay in store.

It was only half an hour later when the four men, closeted in secret conference, were aroused by the sudden shaking and trembling of the vessel. Although the sea a moment before had been as calm as glass, the ship was buffeted as if by storm waves, and rolled and shuddered as though battling with a tempest.

After a moment, the disturbance had subsided, and the vessel proceeded on an even keel. But Dr. Turnbull and his companions, rushing excitedly to the deck, were to learn that their alarm had not been unjustified.

For although the ocean, except for the waning whitecaps, showed no sign of anything amiss, there was manifestly something wrong on Misty Isle. What was that flare of red flame which, surmounting the intervening hazes like a recurrent signal fire, appeared intermittently from the direction of the island?

What was that rose-hued glow in the heavens? What was that dull rumbling in the air, as though from a series of remote explosions? And what those yellow flashes, which every now and then streaked through the skies, like far-off lightnings—except that they had an intensity and a lingering brilliance that lightning rarely possesses?

Why that air of full, indefinable oppression which overhung all things, of something terrible impending, as of some tumult about to descend: a silence and a heaviness that hovered threateningly over the world, weighing like unseen lead upon the nerves, as though the atmosphere were thick with gloomy omens and gathering spirits of evil?

From among the watching men, few words came to break the long, slow interval of waiting. All the joy of a few moments before had been drained from their expression. The quivering of their lips and hands betrayed an agitation that they dared not put into words. Had a bomb of hyperblast exploded? Or had the volcanic forces beneath the island again burst into action? Had Turnbull's experiment dangerously weakened the crust of the earth?

Such were the thoughts which, one may conjecture, flashed into the minds of the officials. For only two explanations of the disturbance were possible, and neither was to be welcomed.

But while Turnbull and his associates stood at the rail in silent reflection or meditatively retired to their cabins, the vessel drove on and on at a steady pace through the bleak seas. During the first hour, it maintained a twenty-two knot speed; yet its progress, though rapid, was not rapid enough.

Once more power from the unknown reached out after the ship. Once more a wave of terrific intensity overtook it, sweeping across the decks and making the craft stagger like a rowboat among rapids. Simultaneously, above the fog-bound shore of the island, a geyser of carmine light shot heavenward, bursting outward amid torrents of sun-bright sparks and scintillations.

Then fountain after fountain of bloody flame was hurled aloft as from the discharge of cyclopean cannon. Hissing red firebrands scattered with phosphorescent trails like great meteors. Low rumblings filled the air, and growled from the fire-tinged clouds. All the skies were a blazing fury, in which torn flags and tatters of orange light and glaring electrical streamers danced and glittered.

The billows, shaken and tortured, leaped up in tempestuous masses, in which the ship began to heave and rock like a toy. Four terror-stricken passengers, watching amid the jolting confusion of the cabins, clung helplessly to the flying furniture and offered up wordless prayers.

Perhaps it was well that they did not see the greatest wave of all. Swollen to the height of a tall hill, it came sweeping from above the horizon. Perhaps it was well that they did not know what frantic efforts the captain was making to turn and meet that wave, prow forward. All that they realized was that suddenly there came a jolt, as of whole mountains piling upon them.

All things outside their cabin were lost amid a dull thundering fury. There was a ringing in their ears and an overtowering dread in their hearts. It seemed to them as if the ship were turning bodily, was falling upon its side.

It rose and shuddered and then fell with a world-drowning roar and crash. The blind waters came rushing in upon them, lashing out at them, choking them, quenching all things amid a chaos of mad, hopeless struggling.

DURING the following days, the newspapers bore interesting reports. It was stated that there had been a volcanic eruption of unusual intensity, which a passing vessel ascribed to some previously uncharted island in the northern Pacific.

At the same time, it was announced that the tidal wave resulting from that eruption had overwhelmed many ships, including the man-of-war on which the President, along with Dr. Turnbull and General Blackfoot, had been taking a vacation cruise.

But, mitigating the evil tidings, there came a more cheerful bit of news: Japan and her neighbor across the Pacific, shocked profoundly by the disaster, had seen the way of sanity, and had submitted all of their differences to successful arbitration.

Today, if one were to voyage to Misty Isle, one would see half a dozen black reefs, the longest not a hundred yards in length, which project above the immensity of the waters. Sea birds have occasionally been known to roost there. Seals from time to time choose the rocks for a sunning place. Mussels and barnacles and tangled seaweed are thick on their lower reaches, and sometimes the great snout of a whale or the long slimy arms of an octopus may be observed projecting above the surf.

But the fogs that gave the island its name have disappeared, and man and the works of man are found no longer mid that stormy desolation.

Copyright, 1929, by Stellar Publishing Corporation

One of the Greatest Scientifiction Classics of All Time!

•

THE MARBLE VIRGIN

By KENNIE McDOWD

•

Next Issue's* HALL OF FAME *Selection!

(Continued from page 12)

Now comes that which all good editors loathe—a suggestion. You have rescued Wesso from the dump heap. You have made Marchioni reform, or so it would seem. Now, then, where is that Paul-illustrated novel you promised? (Sarge glares pugnaciously and signals for his bouncers.) What happened to Jack Binder, by the way? (Hey, Sarge, call off those thugs—they make me nervous.) What's the matter with Alex Schomburg? (Now, boys, put down those gats!) Why not give us—all right, all right, I was only fooling. Send back your storm troopers. Here's where I make a hasty exit.—156 S. University St., Blackfoot, Idaho.

Well, how in the name of ring-tailed lomapards can the old Sarge take a good swing at Kiwi Carter? He covers up and leaves no more opening than Joe Louis. All I can say is that I promise to pin a special medal on Malcolm Jameson for poetry, and I'll tell him to let his hair grow long. He does an incredible assortment of things already, being a cartographer, painter, and musician of sorts among other accomplishments. So now he's a rhyming spaceteer. Oh, well . . .

Comes now a flash from the space port out Montana way.

SPECIAL BROADCAST

By Ray Beebe

All citizens will please remain indoors. The BEMs are at large again. Goggle-eyed goons on your covers were bad enough, Sarge, but just look what Bergey has conjured up now. Demons with fangs, who strangely recall to my mind Dodger fans, class of '41. I remember a crack of some months ago about Wesso's space suits being overstuffed. Our hero on the March cover looks like a mattress ad. La heroine is about the only redeeming feature of an awful cover.

As for the stories in this issue, HORNETS OF SPACE was super-deluxe. It also sported the best pic. I haven't read the rest of the stories, so can't give my full report, but the Hall of Fame story was worth 15c. Is it possible to print, in place of the Hall of Fame, an old novel in serial form, preferably by E. E. Smith?—805 Placer St., Butte, Mont.

So, Pee-lot Beebe, jumping at conclusions, eh? Just along the lines the old Sarge was spouting a couple of asteroids back about the Pearl Harbor business. You haven't read the novel yet, so you don't know about the weird tentacle plants or the hero's penal colony work-suit. You don't even know the gal in diaphanous draper is *not* the heroine. So what does a cover mean to you, anyway? Something to pull up to your chin on wintry nights? And you want a full-length Hall of Fame story to run serially, too. The old Sarge has got you on this one. Hall of Fame serials are running constantly in CAPTAIN FUTURE. You are missing half the space scenery on your course, pee-lot, by not being aware of this. Grab yourself a handful of Captain Future's rose-colored rocket rings and sprinkle some star dust over your brain pan.

I have here a communique from Kiwi Byron Melham—it seems to read here—but I can't reproduce it, unfortunately. It is printed in pencil on a postal card which looks as though the mailman had carried it in his pocket or worn it in the sole of

(Turn page)

"I TALKED WITH GOD"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do — well — there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering — and now— ?—well, I am President of the News Review Publishing Company, which corporation publishes the largest circulating afternoon daily in North Idaho. I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well— this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be — all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about — it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well — just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 38, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now — while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable — but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was. — Advt. Copyright, 1939, Frank B. Robinson.

his shoe and walked all the way from the point of origin. I can decipher that Pee-lot Byron likes TARNISHED UTOPIA and condemns Joe Millard for leaving a story hanging in the air. Okay, Kiwi Melham. Consider your flash acknowledged.

And here's a five-sentence flash from up state.

TO THE POINT

By W. S. MacFarlane, Jr.

Dear Sarge: I can't yet believe it, startling as it is. The March issue of STARTLING STORIES was really good! TARNISHED UTOPIA was actually a genuine science-fiction as well as a good yarn, and the three shorts were good, also! The cover—well, maybe not so good. How about Finlay again? —Mt. Vernon, N. Y.

Well, just as this was beginning to look like a landslide election, the old space dog unearthed this flash from the hook. You birds up front have been going overboard a bit precipitantly. At least, that's what your chief astrogator gathers from—

FAINT PRAISE

By Edward C. Conner

Dear Sergeant Saturn:

I bought the March STARTLING today and I didn't like the cover.

Why can't you get your **artists** to produce something NEW?

Better still—GET NEW ARTISTS.

"Tarnished Utopia" was only fair. The ending bored me. The short stories were perfect, however. Especially the Hall of Fame selection, which certainly deserved the high honor of being printed in STARTLING.

I hope next month's (or I should say next issue of S. S., too bad it isn't monthly.) STARTLING contains a better feature novel than Jameson's yarn. Why—**any** Capt. Future story would top that.—929 Butler St., Peoria, Ill.

Ah, so Pee-lot Conner doesn't care for the bill of fare served in TARNISHED UTOPIA. He prefers to eat blocks of copper with Eek in the Future yarns. Okay, kiwi, everybody to his own metabolism, and may you have plenty of iron in your blood. You'd better go sit on a good-sized hunk of meteorite and think this TARNISHED UTOPIA over before it completely oxidizes on you. Except for your comment, the verdict seems unanimous.

They're all out of step but Jim. But so it goes.

THE "B" BLUES

By Thomas Regan, Jr.

Dear Sarge: Bergey! Belarski! You have them on the cover so much they're driving me mad. What's the matter with Paul, Krupa, Finlay——and even a Wesso cover would do. By the five gods of Pluto, can't we have a story by Wilcox, and Burroughs—the two who wrote that last one that you called a story. It was a tangle of Martian spinach, if you ask me.

TARNISHED UTOPIA was fine, but I wouldn't place it as high as HORNETS OF SPACE.

That guy Lesser is in every mag you pick up. He must have a power over ye Eds. So long till next ish, you old space rat—and please go MONTHLY.—138 Townsend St., New Brunswick, N. J.

Such spatial sass! Old space rat, indeed! I'll have Pee-lot Lesser put some Katzenjammer glue in your space suit, kiwi. By the way, where is Kiwi Lesser? He didn't report for duty this voyage. Which notation gives the old Sarge an idea. Just as a special favor to the kiwis who come late, I'm going to ask all you space pups to get your yapping in as early as possible after an issue of one of our science-fiction books hits the newsstands. In this way, besides simplifying the ethergrams for your harried old astrogator, it will prevent carry-overs of a few letters to the following issue—when the comments will be stale as well as incomprehensible to many kiwis who may have missed the good ship STARTLING STORIES a couple of issues back—or whose I.Q. is such that they can't remember what the beefing is about. Even the old Sarge is occasionally at a loss to understand what you space apes are chattering about.

If you'll learn to scram to your battle stations promptly and stand by for quick broadsides, we can wrap up each issue neatly in the very next issue's department, bomb the daylights out of it, and make merry fireworks for all. On my part, I'll promise to crowd in as many letters and stabs-in-the-back as I can find rocket space for, and hold the blasting off signal until the very last minute. In this way, we won't have to close the ports on, say, the March barrage which should go into the May cargo and then wind up with some March strays in the July issue, at which time the winds of March will have been almost forgotten. Catch on? Then see that you jump lively or you'll get your stern rockets jammed in the air-lock!

Here! Here! What's all this? By the space warps of Arcturus, if the old Sarge hasn't received a card of thanks. By rights it belongs elsewhere, but the old space dog hasn't contracted to use correspondence fuel in any other rocket mixing chamber save The Ether Vibrates. So we take it off the spindle right here.

THANKS

By Harry Jenkins, Jr.

Dear Sarge: Thanks for the reviews of FANART and the SOUTHERN STAR in the current STARTLING. It **is** wonderful to know that somebody appreciates effort. Haven't started the new STARTLING yet, but I'll send in my comments when I finish same—2409 Santee Ave., Columbia, S. C.

Pee-lot Jenkins added some more dope about the new issues, but the old Sarge will get around to blasting the covers off of them in their proper department. All kidding aside, Harry, while the old Sarge doesn't have time to wade painstakingly through the rather formidable pile of fan mags that come in, I do try to size each one up swiftly and make a pertinent wisecrack about it that will prove more helpful than just a sugar-coated, that's-fine-my-little-man pat on the head.

All right, close your traps, all you kiwis, and stop gawking. Haven't you ever seen an accident before? Get along there, you monkeys. Keep moving! Here's a blast

from a bird who hasn't moved in months —he admits it himself.

HIGH AND LOW

By George Aylesworth

Dear Sarge:

Lend an ear, Sarge, whilst this bleary-orbed kiwi proceeds to break a brooding silence of many moons.

First off, I should like to pose a poser; namely—was there ever greater contrast between two consecutive issues of good old S. S. than that apparent in the last two issues? I think not.

January '42 set a new low when manful Manly thrust upon us that "gassly meller-drammer entitled 'Devil's Planet.'" But putrid! The unconvincing Martian atmosphere, and that gosh-awful hero with blond curls and china-blue eyes; detective-mysteries and science-fiction still don't jell, brother! The rest of January's cargo was mild fare with Asimov's yuletide yarn provoking faint chuckles, and old faithful RZG turning out one of his lesser, but interesting, space tales.

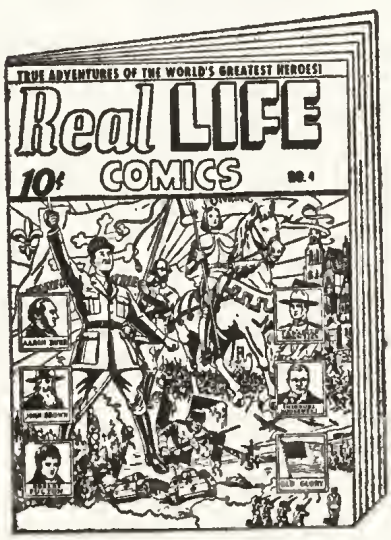
Thus, after starting the new year in somewhat faltering stride, it would have been easy for STARTLING to bog down completely, but a perusal of the March issue proved otherwise.

Jameson's "Tarnished Utopia" was cleverly worked out with some novel twists, that moved the yarn along at a rapid pace, and moved Jameson up a few notches from the fair-to-middlin' classification I had mentally asigned him to some time back. Of course, no novel could be as terrific as the Sarge's blustering and belligerent blurbs in the previous issue would have us believe, anyway. Incidentally, Sarge, next time that meteor-pitted old tub of yours gets marooned halfway between here and Jovopolis, don't try bailing out in a parachute. Those Xeno jags are gettin' ya down, pal!

Back to the March issue for brief comment. The three shorts therein were of the same caliber as the lead novel, with Hank Kuttner dishing out his usual refreshing bit of sci-

(Turn page)

Approved by Parents and Teachers!



NOW ON SALE **10c** AT ALL STANDS

It's New! It's True! It's Different!

Getting Up Nights

If you suffer from Getting Up Nights, Backache, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Swollen Ankles and feel worn out, due to non-organic and non-systematic Kidney and Bladder troubles, you should try Cystex which is giving joyous help to thousands. Printed guarantee. Money back unless completely satisfactory. Ask your druggist for Cystex today. Only 35¢.

High School Course at Home — Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-558, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

FALSE TEETH AS LOW AS $7.95

Per Plate. DENTAL PLATES are made in our own laboratory from your personal impression. Our workmanship and material GUARANTEED or purchase price refunded. We take this risk on our 60-day trial offer. DO NOT SEND ANY MONEY! MAIL POST CARD for FREE Material and Catalog of our LOW PRICES. DON'T PUT IT OFF — Write us TODAY!

BRIGHTON-THOMAS DENTAL LABORATORY
Dept. 1136 6217 S. Halsted Street, Chicago, Ill.

SEND NO MONEY! 16 DAYS' TRIAL

Newest Styles

GLASSES by MAIL

$2.95 & Up COMPLETE

We GUARANTEE SATISFACTION or Your Money Back! We also Repair BROKEN GLASSES.

U. S. FREE Catalog and information!
EYE-GLASSES CO., 1557 Milwaukee Av., Dept. S-82, Chicago

HAND-COLORED in Oil

PHOTO ENLARGEMENT

Beautifully mounted in 7x9 white frame mat. Made from any photograph, snapshot or negative. Original returned. Send 35¢ and stamp—no other charges.

COLORGRAPH, Dept. TF-22
17 N. LeClaire, Chicago.

35c PLUS 3c STAMP for Mailing

U. S. GOVERNMENT JOBS!

START

$1260 to $2100 Year

Many appointments being made.

Men—Women

32 Page Civil Service Book FREE

Mail Coupon today sure.

COUPON

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. H255
Rochester, N. Y.

Sirs: Rush to me without charge (1) 32-page book with list of U. S. Government jobs. (2) Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.

Name .....

Address .....

JUST OUT!

EXCITING NAVY STORIES

A Brand-New Magazine Dedicated to the Men of Our Fighting Fleet

•

Featuring in the First Issue

REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR

A Complete Novelet of War with Japan

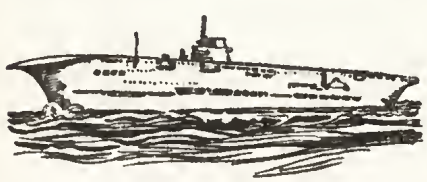
By JEAN FRANCIS WEBB

AND MANY OTHER STORIES

•

Every Patriotic American Should Read

EXCITING NAVY STORIES



NOW ON SALE 10c AT ALL STANDS

entiwhimsy. "Hornets of Space" was a little more entertaining than the past few Hall of Fame yarns, and Millard continues his steady upward climb with, "John Doe, Earthman." This tale obviously calls for a sequel, and obviously is going to get one. I have yet to read a bad yarn by Millard.

To those much-maligned covers: this latest sample seems somewhat subdued. Maybe Bergey is wilting under those vitriolic blasts from the anti-BEM'ers. If so, buck up, Bergey boy! Our organization for bigger and better 'uns has not laid dormant this past year. Quite the opposite our ranks have swelled considerably, and missives received at G. H. Q. have suggested that once again we should burst forth in defense of those superbly executed monstrosities that grace the covers of STARTLING and T. W. S. So to all finicky fans who cower at sight of a toothsome BEM, especially those with weak stomachs, we maliciously chortle—the buggiest-eyed are yet to come!

Having nothing better to do at this point, I should like once again to nominate for the Hall of Fame that quaint little tale which appeared in a '33 WONDER, "The Dweller in Martian Depths" by Clark Ashton Smith. It would doubtless be too "ooogy" for STARTLING'S fem fans (of whom there should be fewer, much fewer) but a few hardened s-f nuts would enjoy ogling it, anyway.

Wonder if the rest of you space-mugs have reached the same conclusion that I have. Namely, that the fastest way to deflate our pestiferous Sarge is to pound a good-sized spike thru his bulging spacesuit while he's poking around on some alien planet for that ever-present cache of Xeno. That oughta "cramp" his style!

So long for now, bub—1439 Orchard Grove, Lakewood, Ohio.

A Methodist preacher told me once, Kiwi

ATTENTION, FANS!

8 SCIENTIFICTION TITLES 25c

Here's your opportunity to obtain a complete set of outstanding scientifiction titles, printed on excellent grade paper, attractively bound. Six individual booklets.

SEND FOR THEM TODAY!

The titles include THE IMMORTALS OF MERCURY, by Clark Ashton Smith; THE SPECTRE BULLET, by Thomas Mack; AVENGING NOTE, by Alfred Sprissler; THE SHIP FROM NOWHERE, by Sidney Patzer; THE MOON MIRAGE, by Raymond Z. Gallun; FLIGHT OF THE AEROFIX, by Maurice Renard; THE INVADING ASTEROID, by Manly Wade Wellman; MEN FROM THE METEOR, by Pansy Black.

BOOK DEPT., 14th Floor, 10 East 40th St., New York

Enclosed 25c in coin (or) stamps. Please rush my set of 8 scientifiction titles.

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

SS5

Aylesworth, that man learns all he knows by two methods, and two methods only—comparison and contrast. That thought has stuck with the old space dog all these years of space-blasting around the System. It's so true that maybe that's why we shove STARTLING STORIES at you space harpies regularly—so you can make your own comparisons and contrasts. And believe you the old astrogator, your comparisons are truly contrasting and your contrasts are often comparable. If the old Sarge let you kiwis take over the ship, we'd chart a far more erratic course than Marco Polo, Sinbad the Sailor, Gulliver, Jason and Ulysses could if they manned Halley's Comet.

And keep your snoot out of my Xeno jug, see?

What's this conglomeration of exclamation points marching at us? It looks like bayonet practice on Luzon Island. Take it away, Kiwi Tackett, but don't thrust any holes through our space shields, or all your hot air will leak out into space.

CHINESE MENU

By LeRoy Tackett

Hiya, Sarge?

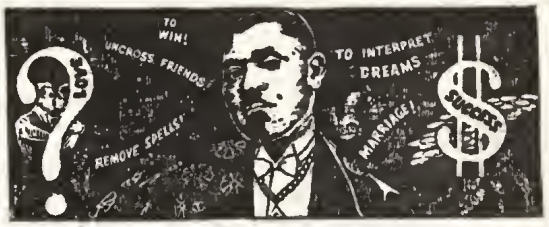
Ha! Bah! Fooey! Nuts, I'm disgusted! Why do you insist on printing those horrible covers? Cover by Bergey. Nuts! Bergey is better than Belarski, but he's still putrid. For instance, the cover does vaguely illustrate a scene from the novel, but if I'm not mistaken, our hero uses an ax and a coil of rope instead of a gun that shoots accordion pleats. Also the pitcher-plants do not have faces. And the background. If the Martian sky is green, science has made a great mistake somewhere.

(Turn page)

PACKED WITH THRILLS!

ONLY **10c** EVERYWHERE

Action on Every Page!



BLACK HERMAN

"The World's Greatest Magician"

Reveals HIS ANCIENT Secrets

Black Herman is alleged to have said that by following the secret instructions revealed in this volume, anyone may find help in obtaining money, love, power, success, jobs, and happiness . . . for it is said that the secrets revealed in this volume would unlock a storehouse of knowledge and power. If you never thought it possible to get results . . . if you seem to be walking around in circles without making progress . . . . if your luck never seems to reach you . . . if your loved ones seem to be drifting away . . . if you seem to be carrying an evil condition that's holding you down . . . if you seem to be persecuted . . . here is your opportunity to learn how to improve yourself to do away with all these. For as sure as the sun rises every morning you can now get the Amazing Secrets of Black Herman to help you overcome these conditions. Not for the $6.00 price marked in every volume, but for the amazingly low price of only $1.00. Don't wait until conditions get you down. Send only $1.00 for this wonderful volume NOW and start to benefit by the advice given you by Black Herman, your Friend and Counsellor.

This Book Purports to Tell You How to

- Master the mysteries of Astrology
- Win love of opposite sex
- Influence people to do your bidding
- Be lucky at all times
- Better your condition
- Bring happiness to broken lives
- Unite people for marriage
- Remove the source of unhappiness
- Interpret your dreams numerically
- Gain mastery of occultism
- Develop your psychic power
- Know what others are doing

SEND NO MONEY! Order C. O. D. and on delivery pay postman $1 plus few cents postage. If you remit $1 with order, we pay postage and shipping costs.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE!

FAITH C. COVEY, 246 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

INVENTORS

Protect your idea with a patent. Don't delay. Get Free "Patent Guide". **CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN and HARVEY JACOBSON,** *Registered Patent Attorneys,* 28-E Adams Bldg., Washington, D. C.

OLD LEG TROUBLE

Easy to use Viscose Method heals many old leg sores caused by leg congestion, varicose veins, swollen legs and injuries or no cost for TRIAL. Describe your trouble and get FREE BOOK.

T. G. VISCOSE METHOD COMPANY
140 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois

SONGWRITERS

Original songs and song poems wanted. NO CHARGE FOR MELODIES. Marketing Service. Free Examination.

HOLLYWOOD RECORDING STUDIOS
Dept. B18, Box 67, Preuss Sta. LOS ANGELES

FALSE TEETH

LOW AS $7.95

90 DAYS' TRIAL
TEST THEM
EXAMINE THEM

We make FALSE TEETH for you by mail from your own impressions. You have satisfaction of MONEY BACK GUARANTEE. Customers in United States and Canada report SATISFACTION but you be your own JUDGE.

SEND NO MONEY WRITE TODAY for FREE BOOKLET and MATERIAL.

J. B. CLEVELAND DENTAL PLATE CO.
Dept. 2-E2, East St. Louis, Illinois

How 50c a Month Pays YOU Up to $75.00 a Month

Here is the new 50c a month SICKNESS AND ACCIDENT POLICY, that is making insurance history. Never before has an insurance bargain like this been offered the people of America. For real value there is nothing like it anywhere. Think of it! For only 50c a month —about 1½c a day, this amazing policy pays you $50.00 a month for Sickness Disability; up to $75.00 a month for Accident Disability; $2,000.00 Accidental Death, and other liberal benefits. Over $900,000.00 cash benefits have already been paid on Sterling policies. Insure with confidence! Sterling Insurance is awarded the highest rating, A+ (excellent) by DUNNE'S, the largest policyholders reporting service in the world. One low cost of 50c a month to anyone in good health, ages 15 to 69. No medical examination. Get policy for FREE inspection—no cost or obligation. No salesman will call. Write today. THIS OFFER IS LIMITED.

EXAMINE THIS POLICY FREE

STERLING INSURANCE COMPANY,
5646 Jackson-Franklin Bldg., Chicago

Please mail me at once for FREE INSPECTION, your new 50c a month Sickness and Accident Policy. I am not obligated. No agent will call.

Name .....

Street Address .....

City ..... State.....

Name of Beneficiary .....

POEMS WANTED

FOR MUSICAL SETTING

Mother, Home, Love, Sacred, Patriotic, Comic or any subject. Don't delay—send us your original poem at once for Immediate Consideration and FREE Rhyming Dictionary. RICHARD BROTHERS, 74 Woods Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

THE TRUTH ABOUT

Stomach Ulcers

Caused by Gastric Hyperacidity

FREE Booklet on simple home treatment. Many report they were saved from expensive operations. Learn all about this amazing inexpensive home treatment. Pain relieved from the start. No rigid or liquid diet. This valuable booklet sent FREE with information as to guaranteed trial offer. TWIN CITY VON CO., Dept. 209, 2938 Pillsbury Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

DICE. CARDS.

Specialties for Magicians use. Inks, Shiners, Check-Cop, Daubs. Catalog ten cents, stamps or coin.
HILL BROS., Box T, Salida, Colo.

America's Favorite Picture Magazine

COLLEGE HUMOR

Only 10c At All Stands

SONG POEMS WANTED

to be set to music. Phonograph records made. Send your poems for our offer and FREE Rhyming Dictionary. Vanderhift Music Studios, Dept. AN, Box 112, Coney Island, N. Y.

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 8 x 10 inches or smaller if desired. Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture. Safe return of original photo guaranteed. 47c 3 for $1.00

SEND NO MONEY Just mail photo or snapshot (any size) and within a week you will receive your beautiful enlargement, guaranteed fadeless. Pay postman 47c plus postage—or send 49c with order and we pay postage. Big 16x20-inch enlargement sent C. O. D. 78c plus postage or send 80c and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer now. Send your photos today. Specify size wanted.
STANDARD ART STUDIOS, 1138 Jefferson St., Dept. 402-E, Chicago

How about Finlay and Paul?

Take a good pull on that Xeno jug and we'll go inside and take the letter section apart. SFTPOCSFP—nuts! These so-called societies are going to be the death of SS and TWS yet. Tell the space rats who form them that alphabetical societies went out with the phlogiston theory. Bye the bye, Sarge, if you ever get that pic off the wall of that spacemen's joint put it on the cover. "A purple night-blooming caw-caw dunking pink elephants in the Red Spot of Jupiter" would be a lot better than some of the stuff you put on the front of SS now. Look, Sarge, I think Lesser is space-nutty but I agree with him on one point. Said point being that you should also review the price of the fanzines. Some of us **do** want to buy them.

The yarns? Ha! "Silent Eden," by Henry Kuttner. Phooey! I didn't like it. "Tarnished Utopia" was good. I mean it. Jameson is really cleaning up the world. In "Time Column" he got rid of Hitler and his bunch of scum. Now he goes into the future and pulls the props out from under another dictator. However, he writes well and I like his stuff. Note to Lesser: If you say this yarn was rotten I challenge you to a duel. Ray cruisers at fifty parsecs. "Mister John Doe, Earthman" was swell. The ending was especially good. You can draw your own conclusions as to whether the System was saved or destroyed. It was saved, of course. It always is. The Hall of Fame selection was excellent as usual.

The science departments were both good and are educational, too.

Lemmesee now, is there anything else? Nope, I guess not, except that I'd like to see a novel by Hamilton in the near future. Ah, me, the batteries are running low so I better take a powder 'till next time. So long, you old space rat—Wayside Inn, Fountain, Colo.

"Ha! Bah! Fooey! Nuts!" Reads like an alley fight between a pair of Chinese laundrymen. And as nutty as a pecan grove in full fruit. Kiwi Tackett, if you were only a mule skinner in the army or a swamper in that said spacemen's café, you would probably develop into one of the System's most fluent cussers. Only your paucity of lurid adjectives restrains you from blowing a head gasket on a mixing chamber. In short, pee-lot, you are the nuts!

And where did you harvest all those exclamation points? Do you eat cactus for breakfast? Uummm—not a bad idea. They distill *pulque* from cactus. A weak imitation of Xeno, but not bad as an ersatz substitute. Maybe you have something there.

Slip your batteries on the charging rack and go bone up on your astrogation chart while the other pee-lots pick and kick your communique to pieces. Some day I'll have Pilot Jameson clean out this department for me. Which will be a bigger job than mopping up a few sickly world dictators.

And now, for a pleasant kick in the seat of my stern rockets, the old Sarge gets a note of commiseration. Take a squint at this fresh flash.

AMMUNITION SHORTAGE

By Robert Sandberg

Dear Sarge:

Poor Belarski! Isn't it about time those space menaces out there stopped throwing brickbats at him? Not that he doesn't deserve it! But it seems like their supply should be exhausted by now. Anyway, I just wanted to tell you that the March ish turned out to be the magazine of my dreams. As long as Kuttner, Jameson, Millard and Starzl are at the controls you can count on my nickel and dime regularly kerplunking in old cash register.

"Mister John Doe, Earthman" is going down in the book with a gold star after it. Why? Merely because it took the cup in the race between the gallant stories whose authors are mentioned above. A close second is "Silent Eden,"—not to be sneezed at is what I'm about to lable it. "Tarnished Utopia" . . . well . . . though not to compare with the duo much talked about before, nevertheless it deserves an E-plus. "Hornets of Space" . . . good plus.

Well, blast me, if it isn't half past a snort of Xeno—1550 E. 63rd St., Chicago, Ill.

Whew! What a cargo! As cocky and saucy a crew of kiwi swabs as ever entered this control-room. The impudence and cheek of you space monkeys. I see that the old Sarge has got to establish order and discipline and respect in this department. Why, when I was a junior pilot on the old *Carrion*, back in—never mind when—chief astrogators never tolerated more than a snappy salute and a crisp "Yes, sir," or "No, sir," from subordinates. Rank mutiny, that's what it is. Well . . . rank, anyhow.

But I know what I can do. I'll hide my Xeno jug. Happy spacings to you space-drunk mugs, and don't forget to batten down the hatches and seal the hot-air locks for next voyage.

SERGEANT SATURN,
The Old Space Dog.

Read Our Companion Science Fiction Magazine

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

•

Featured in the April Issue

THE INFINITE MOMENT

A Complete Time Novel

BY HENRY KUTTNER

Plus Many Other Stories and Features

•

Now on Sale **15c** *At All Stands*

INDIGESTION

may excite the Heart

Gas trapped in the stomach or gullet may act like a hair-trigger on the heart action. At the first sign of distress smart men and women depend on Bell-ans Tablets to set gas free. No laxative but made of the fastest-acting medicines known for symptomatic relief of gastric hyperacidity. If the FIRST TRIAL doesn't prove Bell-ans better, return bottle to us and receive DOUBLE Money Back. 25c at all drug stores.

EASY WAY...

Tints Hair JET BLACK

This remarkable CAKE discovery, TINTZ Jet Black Shampoo, washes out dirt, loose dandruff, grease, grime and safely gives hair a real smooth JET BLACK TINT that fairly glows with life and lustre. Don't put up with faded dull, burnt, off color hair a minute longer. TINTZ Jet Black Cake works gradual . . . each shampoo leaves your hair blacker, lovelier, softer, easier to manage. No dyed look. Won't hurt permanents. Full cake 50c (3 for $1). TINTZ comes in Jet Black, light, medium and dark Brown, Titian, and Blonde. Order today! State shade wanted.

SEND NO MONEY Just pay postman plus postage on our positive assurance of satisfaction in 7 days or your money back. (We Pay Postage if remittance comes with order.) Don't wait—Write today to

TINTZ COMPANY, Dept. 701, 207 N. MICHIGAN, CHICAGO
CANADIAN OFFICE: Dept. 701, 22 COLLEGE STREET, TORONTO

ASTHMA

Paroxysms Relieved

We will send any sufferer a regular $1.25 bottle of Lane's Treatment by mail on FREE TRIAL. Use as directed on label and when satisfied send us $1.25. If not satisfied your report cancels charge. Address
D. J. LANE CO. 269 Lane Building St. Marys, Kans.

ASTHMA

WRITE FOR FREE TRIAL OFFER!

If you suffer from Asthma, Paroxysms, from coughs, gasping, wheezing—write quick for daring FREE TRIAL OFFER of amazing relief. Inquiries from so-called "hopeless" cases especially invited. Write
NACOR, 426-D, State Life Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

LODESTONE LIVE AND STRONG $1 per Pair

7 Keys to Power, $1. Postage extra if C.O.D. Charms. Powders. Oils. Herbs. Novelties, etc., described in FREE Catalog.
D. SMYTHE CO. Box T, NEWARK, MO.

The SMOKER'S BIBLE

The real truth about tobaccos, pipes, cigars, entertainingly presented — inside facts, secrets that will double smoking pleasure, save you hundreds of dollars. Tells how to judge pipes and cigars, how to blend your own tobacco, many private formulae, hundreds of smoking hints. Beautifully bound library edition. Send only $1. Money instantly refunded if you are not delighted. SIDNEY P. RAM, 59 W. Monroe St., Dept. 122, Chicago, Illinois.

SONG & POEM WRITERS

NEW SONGWRITERS in great demand. Send us your Poems. We set them to music FREE. Hear your song on a record. Send for FREE Folder today.
CINEMA SONG CO., P.O. Box 2828, Dept. B-9, Hollywood, Calif.

CHARM DROPS

An enchanting perfume of irresistible allure, clinging for hours with ineffable, fascinating fragrance. Just a tiny drop is enough. Full size bottle 98c prepaid, or $1.32 C.O.D. Directions free. One bottle FREE if two are ordered.

REXBELL, Box 124, Dept. 172 Huntington Station, New York

15 DAYS TRIAL

SPECTACLES from $1.95

100% MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

Mail your name and address to HOME SERVICE SPECTACLE COMPANY, and YOU WILL RECEIVE WITHOUT OBLIGATION Circulars showing latest style spectacles at lowest prices FREE.
Or send 25c and we will mail to you a set of lenses to assist you in the selection of glasses. NOTHING MORE TO PAY UNTIL YOU ARE FULLY SATISFIED.
We handle only HIGH GRADE LENSES. Our Doctor, with many years of experience, GUARANTEES 100% SATISFACTION OR NO COST TO YOU.
WE DUPLICATE AND REPAIR BROKEN SPECTACLES AT GREAT SAVINGS.

Home Service Spectacle Co., Dept. P-25
1011 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

Quit Using Tobacco!
Write for Free Booklet and Learn How.
Results Guaranteed or Money Refunded.
THE NEWELL COMPANY
152 Clayton Station St. Louis, Mo.

100,000 Satisfied Users

MAKE MORE MONEY
Taking Orders For The NIMROD Line

Earn more every day in the year representing old established firm with a complete line of fast selling necessities: Shirts of all kinds, Ties, Underwear, Hosiery, Raincoats, Sweaters, Jackets, Pants, Belts, Breeches, Shoes, Slacks, Ensembles, Sport Coats, Uniforms, etc. Every item guaranteed. Experience unnecessary.
Write quick for FREE SALES EQUIPMENT
NIMROD COMPANY
4922-J Lincoln Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Men, Women Over 40 Don't Be Weak, Old
Feel Like New, Years Younger

Take Ostrex. Contains general tonics, stimulants, often needed after 40 — by bodies lacking iron, calcium phosphate, Vitamin B_1. A 73-year-old doctor writes: "It did so much for patients, I took it myself. Results fine." Special introductory size Ostrex Tonic Tablets costs *only* 35c. Start feeling livelier and younger this very day. For sale at all good drug stores everywhere.

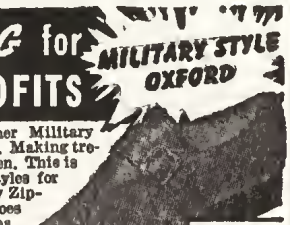
FREE
THE ORIGINAL
BLUE BOOK

• Get this Big, Complete 72 page *Original* Blue Book. Contains mystifying novelties, magicians and conjurers specialties—DICE-CARDS-GAMES, Inks, Layouts, etc. Supplies of all kinds. Write today!

H. C. EVANS & CO.
Dept. 15-E • 1520 WEST ADAMS STREET • CHICAGO

A BLITZKRIEG for SALES and PROFITS

MILITARY STYLE OXFORD



Sensational, soft as glove leather Military Style Oxford selling like wildfire. Making tremendous profits for Victor salesmen. This is one of over 250 specialty shoe styles for dress, sport, work, including new Zipper and Air Cushion Insole Shoes for men and women. Prices low as $2.98. Biggest commissions. Write today for FREE Outfit of Actual Sample Shoes. Reserve your territory. ACT NOW.

FREE SALES KIT

VICTOR SHOE COMPANY, Dept. V-21,
6805 N. CLARK STREET CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

By SERGEANT SATURN

AVAST there, you space bugs! You're trying to take advantage of the indulgence of a kindly and benevolent chief astrogator (the old Sarge makes his own jokes) what with shooting in letters and single sheets and announcements and pleas and whatnot to this department. I have on the ether spindle no less than half a dozen such miscellaneous items which do not fit anywhere else.

On the other hand—ignoring the ray-gun callouses—this is not a communications department. It is strictly a review of fanzines. The old space dog can't blast the covers off a single half-sheet of paper like this:

Dear Sarge, please announce SCIENCE FICTION NEWS MONTHLY. I know you usually like to see the magazine, but won't be out for two months—then every month. Tom Ludowitz, editor, 2310 Virginia, Everett, Wash.

Now how in the saintly name of seven silicon siderites can I review a future publication such as this? My time machine is fresh out of tires, and Captain Future is away on a trip to Halley's Comet. So the old Sarge is stranded here in the present for the present.

There's another one. STARLIGHT PUBLICATIONS wishes to announce the coming of a new kiwi to that organization in February by the name of FAN EDITOR AND PUBLISHER. Can I sensibly make anything out of this sort of stuff? The answer is NO! So I won't say a word about them.

Let's get down to this month's cargo of space-dizzy fanzines.

First I haul out of number one hold like a skinned rat, pages 5 to 12, inclusive, of a contraption called THE DAMN THING. Just that. No editorial page, no nothing. I can't make head or tail of—(see title just above). Let's be marching on.

FANTASY FICTION FIELD (weekly) 1702 Dahill Road, Brooklyn, N. Y. Julius Unger, editor. Price, 5c per copy; 6 for 25c.

Five issues at hand, each with a photo print of a forthcoming science fiction mag cover. No change in format since last reviewed. But the old Sarge notices a pattern of one sheet this issue, two sheets that issue, one sheet the next issue. What is this? A spatial dot and

dash code to transmit messages? Anyway, news of the professional magazines for fans. Blast on!

FANTASY NEWS (weekly s-f newspaper) Box 84, Elmont, N. Y. William Sykora, editor. Price, three issues for ten cents.

Four issues at hand. No change in this format, either. Have I got to go over this same cargo every time? It's a cinch the old Sarge ain't gonna re-hash the subject matter for you space apes. More news about editors, authors and mags. Black ink on yaller sheets, single-spaced, no illustrations. Wait a light mile! More of that spatial code. Two sheets on the first, and then three single. Maybe the old Sarge is getting it—a dash and three dots. V for Victory, huh? More fuel in the stern rockets, pee-lots.

FANTASCIENCE DIGEST (bi-monthly) 333 E. Belgrade Street, Philadelphia, Pa. Robert A. Madle, Rust E. Barron & Jack Agnew, editors. Price 15c per copy; 75c for six issues.

Zowie! Tip my homberg and call me Eden, if it isn't Mother Eve and the serpent on the pastel green cover. And Mama forgot her fig leaf. I remember a Jovian barmaid in the Stellar Café at—er—but to get on with the review. Thirty pages of nicely arranged and balanced cargo. Black ink on white paper. Pretty good stuff, kiwis, even if I couldn't find any more pictures except headings.

FANTASY TIMES (monthly) 137-07 32nd Ave., Flushing, New York. James V. Taurasi, editor. Price 5c per copy.

Hmmm—two sheets, four pages of three-column stuff. And full of cuts and doo-dads —including a pass-port photo of the editor-publisher. Black on white, and a slick little job. Too bad there isn't more.

JINX (quarterly) 2409 Santee Ave., Columbia, S. C. Harry Jenkins, editor. Price, 10c per copy.

Well, of all the crust! A picture of the old Sarge right on the cover. Anyway, it looks like him. Nice little job of five sheets—ten pages, including the cover. Brown ink on blue paper, black ink on inner pages. The old Sarge will have to break down and admit that those S.C. boys cut nice, clean stencils. Oh, yeah, green ink, too. Color competition for Captain Future, eh? Well, good luck on this maiden voyage.

NOVA (bi-monhtly) 86 Upton Ave., Battle Creek, Mich. Al Ashley, editor. Price, 10c per copy, 60c per year.

Another new mag! Looks like air-brush work on the cover, simple blue design on smooth white bristol board. Thirty-six pages of balanced diet with neat headings in red or blue or green ink. Good stuff. Reminiscent of high school publications for quality. Editor also included program of Michifan 1941 convention. Nice rocketing, kiwis. The old Sarge will have to grant your junior astrogator's license on this one.

SCIENCE FICTION FAN (monthly —?) 2915 Champa Street, Denver, Colo. Olon F. Wiggins, editor. Price, one-year subscriptions only, $1.

Ah, one of those independent pocket battleships, eh? Anyway, it's pocket size and has twenty pages of nice sepia—brown, to you space harpies—ink on white paper. Headings in simple line drawings. Art work can be

[*Turn Page*]

It's Easy To Be A Contractor

Learn to estimate, to plan buildings; to take contracting jobs; and make money on them. Here are 9 up-to-the-minute books on building, estimating, and contracting which cover in an interesting way, the subjects that carpenters, builders, and contractors should know to make the most out of their jobs. Roof Framing, The Steel Square, Architectural Drawing and Design, Estimating, Painting and Decorating, Heating, Air Conditioning, Building, Contracting, Concrete Forms and other subjects are all well covered.

"Boss" Carpenters in Demand

Vast public works jobs, immense projects, and the rapid growth of home building, are making jobs for MEN WHO KNOW HOW. These books give you quick training. With them you shouldn't be afraid to tackle any job, for needed facts can be found in a burry.

Up-to-Date EDITION

These books are the most up-to-date, complete we have ever published on these subjects.

Coupon Brings Nine Books FREE For Examination

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY (Publishers—Home Study Courses)
Dept. G-549, Drexel at 58th Street, Chicago, Illinois

You may ship me the Up-to-Date edition of your nine big books, "Building, Estimating, and Contracting" without any obligation to buy. I will pay the delivery charges only, and if fully satisfied in ten days, I will send you $2.00, and after that only $3.00 a month, until the total price of only $29.80 is paid. I am not obligated in any way unless I keep the books.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Please attach a letter stating your age, occupation, employer's name and address, and that of at least one business man as a reference.

FREE WEDDING RING

You'll be proud to wear this beautiful Wedding Ring. It's yours ABSOLUTELY FREE if you order one of our gorgeous Beptloa Diamond Solitaire Engagement Rings and pay for it within 10 days on our easy payment plan. The engagement ring has large flashy brilliant center stone with side stones. Wedding Ring is handsomely embossed with Lover's design to match. Choice of 14K, Yellow Gold finish or Rhodium Finished—White. **HOW TO GET FREE WEDDING RING:** Just send us name and address and ring size (place strip of paper tightly around finger) and 25¢ to show good faith. When parcel arrives pay $1 plus few cents postage within 10 days and both rings are yours to keep—nothing more to pay. If you prefer send $1 cash or money order for both rings and we pay postage. No more to pay. Rush order today.
Harlem Co., 30 Church St., Dept. T 503, New York, N. Y.

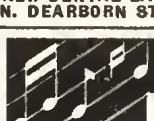
FALSE TEETH *Low as* **$6.85**

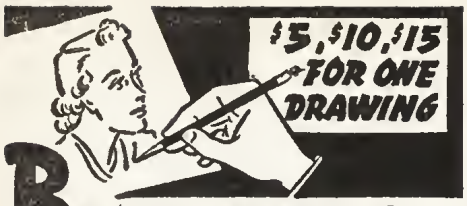
90 DAYS TRIAL
TEST THEM
EXAMINE THEM

We make FALSE TEETH for *you* BY MAIL from your mouth-impression! Money-Back GUARANTEE of Satisfaction. FREE impression material, directions. Booklet of New Styles and Information. Write today to

FREE

SEND NO MONEY

PARKER DENTAL LABORATORY
127 N. DEARBORN STREET, DEPT. 17D, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

SONG POEM WRITERS
Write today for free Booklet outlining profit sharing plan.
ALLIED MUSIC
Dept. 32, 7608 Reading, Cincinnati, O.



Be an ARTIST!

—Train at Home in Your Spare Time

The fascinating field of Art offers commercial opportunities to men and women. COMMERCIAL ART, CARTOONING, ILLUSTRATING all in one complete course. TWO ART OUTFITS furnished. Learn to draw step-by-step. Trained Artists are capable of earning $30, $50, $75 a week. Write today for full information in FREE BOOK, "Art for Pleasure and Profit." No obligation. State age.

WASHINGTON SCHOOL of ART, Studio 66SA
1115—15th St., N. W. WASHINGTON, D. C.

FREE BOOK gives details

USED Correspondence Courses

Complete home-study courses and educational books, slightly used. Sold, rented, exchanged. All subjects. Money-back guarantee. Cash paid for used courses. Full details and illustrated 72-page bargain catalog FREE. Write today!
NELSON CO.
500 Sherman, Dept. E-227, Chicago

ASTHMA

Symptoms Relieved. Write today for FREE INFORMATION and SPECIAL MONEY BACK OFFER.

W. K. STERLINE
830 POPLAR STREET SIDNEY, OHIO

FISTULA FACTS

Do you suffer pain, torture and broken health of neglected Piles, Fistula or related rectal and colon ailments? Write today for 122-page FREE BOOK. Learn facts. The McCleary Clinic, 597 Elms Blvd., Excelsior Springs, Missouri.

Calling All Puzzle Fans!

Ask Your Newsdealer for

POPULAR CROSSWORD PUZZLES

•

IT'S GRAND! 10c EVERYWHERE!

improved. Nicely straight-line margins. These kiwis rocket a straight course. Contents? Don't get fresh with the old space dog. You birds know be doesn't read all that stuff.

SOUTHERN STAR (bi-monthly) 908 Lloyd Court, Columbia, S. C. Joseph Gilbert, editor. Price 10c per copy; three copies, assorted, 25c.

Bargain day, eh? Anyway, nice yellow art paper covers with illustrations. And forty-two pages of single-spaced copy within. I guess you get your money's worth. And a page of snapshots of fans at the Denvention.

SPACEWAYS (eight times yearly) 303 Bryan Place, Hagerstown, Md. Harry Warner, Jr., editor. Price, 10c per copy, three issues for 25c.

Nice pink covers with symbolic drawings. Twenty-four pages of black ink on white. Contents seem well-balanced. Simple little illustrations scattered along like the old game of Hare-and-Hounds to pull you through the issue to the prize-winner on the back cover which is Lady Godiva taking a sun bath on her back stoop and being surprised by the Green Ghost Detective. Plenty of reading. Good for the dog-watch on the Mars-Jupiter run.

SUNSPOTS (bi-monthly) 31 Bogert Pl., Westwood, N. J. Gerry de la Ree, Jr. & Roderick Gaetz, editors. Price, 10c per copy; three copies for 25c.

Oh, yeah, this is that pocket size feature printed in regular type. Twelve pages. Two or three photo cuts, beginning with a trio of rogues on the cover—Wellman, Millard and Binder. Carry on, kiwis, but clip your folios together. Whoever heard of making a spatial voyage without battening down all hatches and lashing loose cargo?

UNIVERSE STORIES (monthly?) 2310 Virginia, Everett, Wash. Thomas J. Ludowitz, editor. Price, 10c per copy, 75 per year.

Another new space craft? Or is this the way SCIENCE FICTION NEWS MONTHLY comes out when it hits outer space? Twelve pages of misspelled typing, including the covers. Purple ink on white paper. Ho-hum.

VOICE OF THE IMAGI-NATION (Sixwkly) Box 6475, Metropolitan Station, Los Angeles, Cal. Forrest J. Ackerman & Morojo, editors. Price, 10c per copy; 90c yearly.

This is that long drink of water—8½x14. Nice classic drawing on the cover, goddesses a bit on the chunky side with Prometheus' stolen torch of fire, a shield with the double face of Janus, a flight of steps with an hour-glass temple at the apex. Pretty. As good as anything I ever got out of a Xeno jug. Plenty of text inside, too—green ink on white. The old Sarge nearly went crazy trying to fold pages 12 and 13 together to piece together the bisected gal with the bat wings and make her look svelte, but every time she came out like Minsky's burlesque.

That cleans out the cargo hold for this voyage. Seems like the old Sarge will have to figure out some system of grading these astrogation papers so you pee-lots can classify yourselves as to how you rate among each other. And then again, maybe I won't.

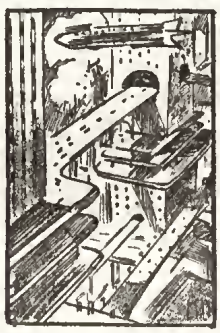
A glance at some of the editorials and news items here and there as I stoically waded through told the old Sarge that you harpies read each other's manifest sheets and pick the cargoes to pieces.

So it's just as well Saturn doesn't go to this length. Somebody has to sit in the chief astrogator's seat and preserve dignity if not order.

So slap on your space suits and zipper up your fan-mags and have at each other's throats. And let a kindly and benevolent old spaceman consult with a fresh jug of Xeno.

—SERGEANT SATURN.

Coming in the Next Issue



CITY OF GLASS

An Amazing Complete Book-Length Novel of a Trip into the Void

By

NOEL LOOMIS

•

THE MARBLE VIRGIN

A Hall of Fame Classic

By

KENNIE McDOWD

•

Plus Many Other Stories and Special Features

NOW EVERY MAN CAN LEARN

BLUEPRINT READING

NEW EASY WAY

MAKE BIG MONEY!

Learn Blueprint Reading! Thousands of men needed at once in every Defense Trade! New, easy method that everyone can understand at a glance —"BLUEPRINT READING MADE EASY"! In one Big beautifully bound Volume for HOME STUDY.

Short Cut TO A BETTER JOB

The big pay men in every war industry are the ones who work from Blueprints. This course covers every trade. SIMPLE AS A.B.C.! NO PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE NEEDED. Shows in simple language how to read Blueprints. You learn quickly — almost "overnight". Entirely new type of Blueprint self-instruction created by production experts to meet the present emergency.

592 PAGES and over 550 ILLUSTRATIONS

Including Charts — Tables — Diagrams — Signs — Symbols — and Other Instructive Pictures. There is an illustration on practically every page in this easy course—presented in the most simplified form—so that you understand Blueprint Reading almost at a glance. Whatever your occupation, you will find this valuable instruction that can make you ready for BIGGER PAY.

SEND NO MONEY

"Blueprint Reading Made Easy" will be shipped to you for 5 days free examination. You risk nothing.

Mail coupon NOW.

A. NEIL SAWYER & CO.
143 W. 42th St., Div. TG-S, N.Y.C.
Send me on FREE APPROVAL, "BLUEPRINT READING MADE EASY". I will pay postman $2.98 (plus postage). If not satisfied I may return it in 5 days and you will refund my money.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... State.....

We pay postage if money accompanies order. Same money back guarantee.

SONG POEMS WANTED

TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Free Examination. Send Your Poems to

J. CHAS. McNEIL, MASTER OF MUSIC

510-TF So. Alexandria Los Angeles, Calif.

EYE GLASSES BY MAIL

GLASSES as LOW as $1.95 PAIR

16 DAYS TRIAL

Choice of the LATEST STYLES—remarkably LOW PRICES. SATISFACTION GUARANTEED or your money back. If you are not satisfied—they will not cost you a cent.

SEND NO MONEY. Write for FREE catalog today showing all of our many styles and LOW PRICES!

BROKEN GLASSES REPAIRED AT LOW COST!

ADVANCE SPECTACLE CO.

537 S. Dearborn St., Dept. T-S Chicago, Ill.

FALSE TEETH by MAIL! SEND NO MONEY!

from WORLD'S LARGEST DENTAL PLATE MAKERS

Made for you on 60 DAYS' TRIAL $7.95 to $35

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE of SATISFACTION. From your own mouth impression. FREE impression material, directions, catalog. Write today.

U. S. DENTAL CO., 1555 Milwaukee Ave., Dept. S-82, Chicago

"The 7 Keys to Power alleges to teach," the author says, "All the Mysteries of Life from the Cradle to the Grave—and Beyond. It claims to tell you the particular day and hour to do anything you desire, whether it be in the light of the moon, sun, or in total darkness."

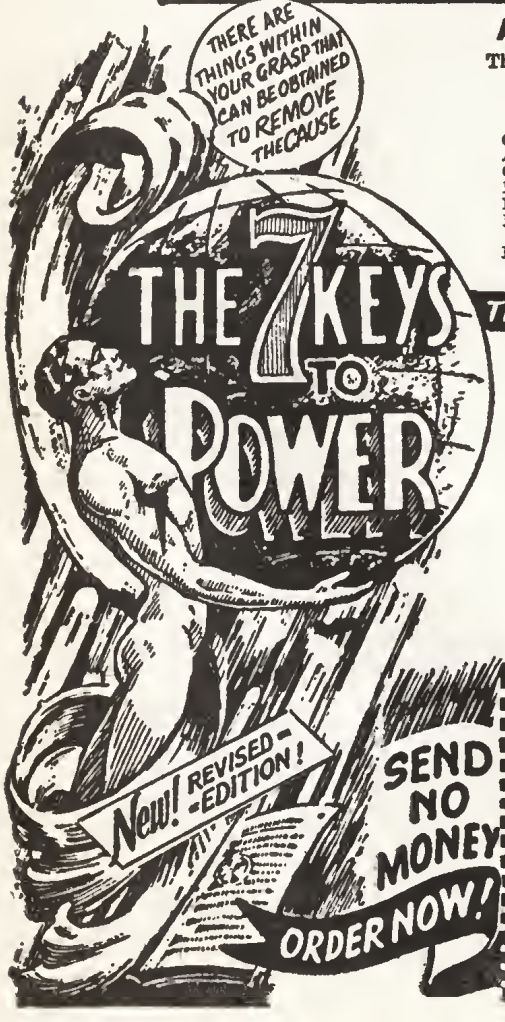
He claims, "The power to get what you want revealed at last, for the first time since the dawn of creation. The very same power which the ancient Chaldeans, Cuthic, Egyptians, Babylonians and Sumerians used is at our disposal today."

He says, "Follow the simple directions, and you can do anything you desire. No one can tell how these Master Forces are used without knowing about this book, but with it you can mold anyone to your will."

From this book, he says, "You can learn the arts of an old Science as practiced by the Ancient Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book," Lewis de Claremont claims. "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them."

He claims, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life: MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these, then this book has an important message for you. No matter what you need, there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need."

OVERCOME ALL ENEMIES, OBSTACLES & HIDDEN FEARS



ARE YOU CROSSED IN ANY WAY?

The Seven Keys to Power, Lewis de Claremont says, shows you how to remove and cast it back.

The Book Purports to Tell You How to—

- Gain affection and admiration.
- Adjust disputes.
- Obtain property.
- Make people do your bidding.
- Make any person respect you.
- Make people bring back stolen goods.
- Make anyone lucky in any games.
- Feel strong and fit.
- Get any job you want.
- Understand mental telepathy.
- Help people in trouble.
- Banish all misery.
- Gain the mastery of all things.
- Restore your ambition.
- Choose words according to ancient, holy methods.

THE ONLY TRUE BOOK OF SUPREME MASTERSHIP!

This is the Power, he says, from which the old masters gained their knowledge and from which they sold limitless portions to certain favored Kings and others at high prices, but never to be revealed under a vow, the violation of which entailed severe punishment.

THE VOW HAS NOW BEEN BROKEN

This book, he claims, shows you the secrets of old which when properly applied make you able to control the will of all without their knowing it. If you have a problem and you wish to solve it, he says, don't hesitate. Advertisements cannot describe nor do this wonderful book justice. You must read it and digest its meaning to really appreciate its worth.

GUARANTEED TO SATISFY OR YOUR MONEY REFUNDED

Only a limited number available for sale, so don't wait. It is worth many times its price. If you are wise, you will rush your order for this book NOW.

$1.

MR. LUCK'S CURIO CO., Dept. 519
800 N. Clark Street.,
Chicago, Illinois.

This coupon is worth $1.00 to you. Attach a Money Order for $1 to this coupon and we will send you your copy of The Seven Keys to Power—Regularly $2 for only $1.

Name ....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

SEND NO MONEY!
If you wish we Trust You. . . . Pay Postman $1 on delivery plus a few pennies Postage. Check here ( ).

Genuine-Late UNDERWOOD NOISELESS

Now $39.85 CASH

OR EASY TERMS—70c A WEEK

MFRS. ORIG. SELLING PRICE $125.00

Completely Reconditioned and Fully Guaranteed.

W. F. CLAUSING, President
Rebuilding typewriters for over 30 years.

Truly the most outstanding offer I have given my customers in years! Only because of an exceptional purchase can I sell these completely reconditioned machines at the sensationally low price of $39.85 (cash) or on easy terms of 70c a week. Each one carefully gone over and refinished so that its lustre gives it the appearance of a brand new machine costing over three times as much. *The mfrs. orig. selling price on this Underwood was $125.00.* It's sent to you in Underwood packing box with Underwood book of instructions on care and operation.

A NOISELESS MACHINE

Latest achievement in typewriters! Provides writing perfection with SILENCE. For those who want the advantages of a quiet home or office. This Underwood's Noiseless mechanism eliminates the nerve shattering clatter common to many models. *An aid to better work because it allows clear thinking, reduces fatigue, improves accuracy.* This typewriter disturbs no one, for it is almost impossible to hear it operate a few feet away. You get all the features of an Underwood **PLUS Noiseless typing.**

EXTRA VALUE! TYPEWRITER STAND

For those who have no typewriter stand or handy place to use a machine, I make this special offer. This attractive stand that ordinarily sells for $4.85 can be yours for only $3.50 extra —payable 25c a month. **Quality built. Note all its convenient features.**

NO MONEY DOWN 10 DAY TRIAL

Easy Terms—10c A Day

Liberal Allowance on Your Old Machine

No obligation to buy. See machine on wide open 10 day trial. Pay me no money until you test, inspect, compare, and use this Underwood Noiseless. Judge for yourself without hurry and without risk. When you are convinced that this is the biggest typewriter bargain you have ever seen then say, "I'll Buy." Send only 70c a week or $3.00 a month until term price of only $43.85 is paid. Try it first, enjoy a full 10 days' steady use. **There is no red tape or investigation—My offer is exactly as I state it.**

2-YEAR GUARANTEE

I back this machine with my personal 2-yr. guarantee that it is in A-1 condition in every respect—that it will give first class service. Over 30 years of fair dealing and my 200,000 satisfied customers prove the soundness of my golden rule policy and prove that dealing direct with me saves you money.

SPECIAL!

14" Models—No Extra Charge

Very special price while 67 last! The 14 inch carriage genuine reconditioned Underwood has all No. 5 equipment plus the 14 inch carriage but is not of noiseless construction. This is the model you need for reports, large office forms, billing, etc., for it takes paper 14 inches wide and has a 12 inch writing line. **Yours at No Extra Cost while our present supply lasts. A real buy, so order today!**

FIRST CHOICE OF TYPISTS

OVER 5,000,000 UNDERWOODS NOW IN USE! Recognized as the finest, strongest built! Has all standard equipment—keyboard, 2 colors, back spacer, automatic reverse, tabulator, etc. **THERE IS NO RISK! SEE BEFORE YOU BUY ON MY 10 DAY NO OBLIGATION TRIAL PLAN.** If you wish send the machine back at my expense.

International Typewriter Exchange
231 W. Monroe St. Dept. 588 Chicago, Ill.

FREE

Touch Typing Course

A complete home study course of famous Van Sant Touch Typing system. *Learn to type quickly and easily.* Carefully illustrated. Written expressly for home use.

MAIL COUPON NOW · Limited Quantity on Sale!

International Typewriter Exchange, Dept. 588, 231 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill.
Send Underwood (F.O.B. Chicago) for ten days' trial. If I keep it, I will pay $3.00 per month until easy term price ($43.85) is paid. If I am not satisfied I can return it express collect.
☐ 10" carriage, Underwood Noiseless. ☐ 14" carriage Underwood—Not Noiseless.
☐ Check for typewriter stand ($3.50 extra—payable 25c a month). Stand sent on receipt of first payment on Underwood.

Name ..... Age.....
Typewritten signatures not acceptable
Address .....
City ..... State.....
CAUTION—For quick shipment give occupation and reference

don't Worry about Rupture

● Why put up with days . . . months . . . YEARS of discomfort, worry and fear? Learn now about this perfected invention for all forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire—you eagerly CRAVE to enjoy life's normal activities and pleasures once again. To work . . . to play . . . to live . . . to love . . . with the haunting Fear of Rupture banished from your thoughts! Literally *thousands* of rupture sufferers *have* entered this *Kingdom of Paradise Regained.* Why not you? Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where others fail is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless, *do not despair.* The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

Patented AIR-CUSHION Support Gives Nature a Chance to CLOSE the OPENING

Think of it! Here's a surprising yet simple-acting invention that permits Nature to close the opening—that holds the rupture securely but gently, day and night, at work and at play! Thousands of grateful letters express heartfelt thanks for results beyond the expectation of the writers. What is this invention—How does it work? Will it help me? Get the complete, fascinating facts on the Brooks Automatic Air Cushion Appliance—send now for *free* Rupture Book.

Cheap—Sanitary—Comfortable

Rich or poor—ANYONE can afford to buy this remarkable, LOW-PRICED rupture invention! But look out for imitations and counterfeits. The Genuine Brooks Air-Cushion Truss is never sold in stores or by agents. Your Brooks is made up, after your order is received, to fit your particular case. You buy direct at the low "maker-to-user" price. The perfected Brooks is sanitary, lightweight, inconspicuous. Has no hard pads to gouge painfully into the flesh, no stiff, punishing springs, no metal girdle to rust or corrode. It brings heavenly comfort and security—while the Automatic Air Cushion continually works, in its own, unique way, *to help Nature get results!* Learn what this patented invention can mean to you—send coupon quick!

PROOF!

Read These Reports on Reducible Rupture Cases.

(In our files at Marshall, Michigan, we have over 33,000 grateful letters which have come to us entirely unsolicited and without any sort of payment.)

Likes Brooks Best

"I bought one of your Rupture Appliances in 1933, wore it day and night for one year and laid it aside last December. The rupture hasn't bothered me since. I used several others without success until I got a Brooks."—J. B. McCarter, Route 2, Box 104, Oregon City, Ore.

"Runs and Plays"

"My son has not worn the Appliance for over a year. He wore one for ten years and I am very grateful now to think he has laid it aside. He is twelve years old, runs and plays hard like all boys and is never bothered about the rupture."—Mrs. M. George, Route 1, Box 103, Cumberland, Md.

C. E. BROOKS, Inventor

SENT ON TRIAL

No . . . don't order a Brooks now—FIRST get the complete revealing explanation of this world-famous rupture invention. THEN decide whether you want the comfort—the freedom from fear and worry—the security—the same amazing results thousands of men, women and children have reported. They found our invention the answer to their prayers! Why can't you? And you risk nothing as the complete appliance is SENT ON TRIAL. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate this no-risk trial. Send for the facts now—today—hurry! All correspondence strictly confidential.

FREE! Latest Rupture Book Explains All!

Sent You in Plain Envelope **Just Clip and Send Coupon ➡**

Brooks Appliance Co., 182C State St., Marshall, Mich.

Mail This Coupon NOW!

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
182-C State St., Marshall, Mich.

Without obligation, please send your FREE Book on Rupture, Proof of Results, and TRIAL OFFER—all in plain envelope.

*Name*_____

*Street*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____

State whether for Man ☐ *Woman* ☐ *or Child* ☐